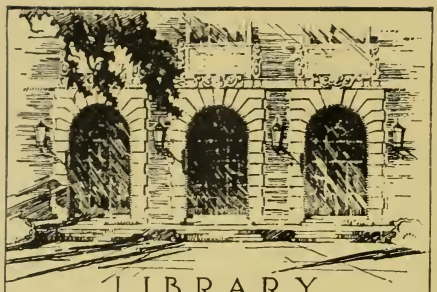
THE COBRA DIAMOND

Hamilton J. Bunbury.

March 1842.



THE COBRA DIAMOND.

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BY

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THE COBRA DIAMOND.

CHAPTER I.

HE AND SHE.

It is the year of the Jubilee; and London is full of princes, black, white, and yellow. Three days ago Her Gracious Majesty passed through the streets; and the diamonds of the Thakoor of Bangle Pindy eclipsed all other gems. This may be the reason why all London is crowding to-night to the house of Lord Aveling, in Grosvenor Square, expressly to meet him. In the midst of life's pageants life's dramas go on; the great and the petty. Folks coquette and make love; folks fret and despair. A love drama is going on between a lady and gentleman,

sitting on the stairs. Let us listen to the dialogue.

"But all love, Lady Gwendoline, is not grimace. Some folks are in earnest even here. Let us trust that that lady in pink and the bald, banking gentleman are affinities."

"Affinities," said the lady, with a funny little pout.

"Yes, affinities."

The lady worked her fan for some seconds. The evening was sultry.

"It seems to me," she said at length, "that on this hot, suffocating planet one half of the human race are unhappy because they can't find their affinities, and the other half are unhappy because they—have found them."

"You are paradoxical to-night."

"Am I?"

"You seemed to love me once."

"When?"

"Never mind when," said the young man, bitterly.

"My dear friend, don't you know that marriage with maidens of high degree is a mere coupling of names—Lady This must marry Lord That."

"Why must she?"

"Because Lady This and Lord That are affinities, I suppose."

"Witness Lord and Lady Battle Royal."

"Or because Lady This loves jewels, carriages, fine clothes, town houses, country houses, admiration, the power of crushing her rivals."

"That is the devil's language, Lady Gwendoline."

"The devil's language," said the lady, with a wry face. "Perhaps so; but now we must talk seriously, quite seriously."

"Agreed."

"When we cannot get what we want, it is better to give up the false hope."

"That's just what I don't intend to do," said the last speaker, with some emphasis.

"You don't propose to cut your throat?" said the lady, alarmed at his tone.

"I am not such a fool as that; look here."

"What a tiny little bottle, and what exquisite jade!"

"Exquisite," said the young man.

"What is this lovely little gem?"

"It is a remedy, a magical remedy, Lady Gwendoline; it cures the shame of penury."

"This is farcical."

"It is perhaps the least farcical thing in the whole universe."

"I am bad at riddles," said the lady, a little abruptly.

"It is a famous Chinese poison called the 'Peacock's Blood.' It is carried about by Mandarins; and two drops will carry a mortal at once to Kingdom Come."

"What fine diamonds Mrs. Da Costa has," said the lady, with a frigidity a little overdone.

If a calm, unbiassed observer—the present gentleman is scarcely such — had carefully scrutinised the handsome countenance of Lady Gwendoline during this dialogue, he might have been a trifle puzzled. Well-bred people wear a mask, for life is a comedy. But behind the laughing Lady Gwendoline there seemed a second Lady Gwendoline that was by no means a laughing individual. When the young man talked of suicide, there was a look—a momentary look, almost Dantesque in its intensity.

Monty Lepel was a captain in the Scots Greys, who had cantered about during the recent procession, helping to keep the streets clear. He was good-looking, tall, well-knit, with a high nose, and thoughtful eyes. In a short career he had known both poverty and luxury.

His earliest recollection was a small villa at Wandsworth. In this he dwelt with an uncle, Mr. Silas Huxtable. His mother was

said to have died giving him birth; but some mystery clung round her. Mr. Silas Huxtable was in a house of business in the City; and as he had two daughters and a son, and his income was small, life in this family was a struggle. Young Monty went to a cheap school until he was thirteen or fourteen. There he had an adventure which coloured his life. There was a boy in this school named Scales, a heavily built boy, selfish and malignant. With this boy Monty had a quarrel which ended in a fight. Neither combatant gained the victory; and bad blood continued between them. This boy stirred up some of the other boys against our hero. One day when they were whispering together and glancing at him, he heard, as he thought, "He was born in a barn." What was the meaning of this? Had Scales any secret information? Was his birth illegitimate? Some thoughts hide in the brain in the day, but prowl at night like the hyena.

The whisper of the little schoolboys was of this pattern.

When the boy was about fifteen a change came over his prospects. An uncle in India sent him money to have him educated at a crammer's. Then he passed his examination and got a commission in a line regiment—the regiment of Dorking. It was quartered at Gibraltar. One morning he embarked upon the fine steamer *Aliwal*, and left Portsmouth in a gray mist.

Two days before the vessel reached Gibraltar an invalid appeared on deck. Some little fuss heralded his appearance. A cane couch was prepared. The captain and officers seemed excited, and so did some of the ladies. The invalid was a good-looking man of about thirty, singularly aristocratic in appearance. His name was Lord George Ingilby.

A fortnight after this, when Monty had joined his regiment, as he was coming home from mess, he heard cries and a scuffle. He

hurried to the spot, and extricated an Englishman from the clutches of two Spanish sailors. It was the invalid of the steamer. Monty got assistance, and had him carried home. He was a captain in the regiment of Dorking.

In this noble corps the young officer found an old friend, or rather old enemy. This was Mr. Scales. This amiable young gentleman persuaded the other young officers that Monty was not a fit and proper person to continue in so distinguished a regiment. In consequence they put frogs into his patent leather boots, and dressed up a large mastiff in his full-dress uniform. They sewed up the sleeves of his shell-jacket, and made him apple-pie beds. They ordered a coffin to be sent one day to his quarters.

Poor Monty was bewildered. In this cruel dilemma resistance means Coventry, and non-resistance ruin. He thought of Lord George Ingilby, and determined to ask his advice.

"Lepel, take a seat, sir. By Gad, you're

the fellow that saved my life." Lord George was in luxurious quarters fitted up in the Eastern manner.

"Not quite that, Lord George."

"By Gad, you did, sir, and I owe you a grudge—by Gad, I do." Lord George was a bit of a character.

"I am very sorry——"

"Don't apologise. It's too late now. Life's a big hunt, political, fashionable, literary, artistic, clerical, military. The human race may be divided into two groups, those who pursue the fox's dirty brush, and those who've got it—the latter group by no means the happier of the two."

"Is that your view of life?"

"Yes, damme, yes, and it's a true one. I owe you a grudge. You have put me back in the hunt."

"I am very sorry, Lord George," said Monty, a little seriously, "because I was going to ask you a favour."

"What is it?" said the eccentric Lord George, in kinder tones.

"Tell me this—have you heard about me any story in the regiment?"

"Not a word—didn't know you existed—I mean no story."

"Well, the fact is, I have been sent to Coventry by my brother officers—the younger ones; and really I don't know why." Here Monty narrated to Lord George the fantastic proceedings of Scales and the other young officers.

"My dear fellow," said Lord George, after a pause, "all this is awkward—devilish awkward."

"I feel it."

"You see, a man can't challenge a whole mess like Lundyfoot of old. Who are your chief enemies?"

"Barnes and an old schoolfellow. He owes me a grudge."

"Who is that?"

"A man named Scales."

"Scales! D—n Scales," said Lord George, with an energy that did not seem in any way called for by the circumstances of the case.

"Do you know Scales?"

"No, no," said his lordship, abruptly, and then he added in a kinder tone: "My dear enemy, who has put me back into the old, old hunt—— By-the-bye, what is my dear enemy's name?"

"Lepel."

"Lepel—Lepel. Dear me! Would you hand me that desk, dear Lepel? I am a little feeble—seedy, you know."

"This desk?" said Monty, handing the object to which Lord George was pointing.

"Just so," said the eccentric lord, opening it with a golden key. He searched amongst a heap of letters and opened one.

"Lepel—Lepel—I thought I had a letter," said Lord George, perusing one a little carefully. "Lepel!"

That night Lord George was at the mess, a rare event with him. He sat some way off from Monty, and looked fatigued and ill. Scales and his party had prepared a new practical joke of immense brilliancy. After dinner, Monty was told by the adjutant that a subaltern, named Denman, had been taken ill, and that he must relieve him and stay at the main guard all night.

The conspirators had got scent of this, and their plan was to pack up the young officer's valuables in a large tin bath and float them in the sea. When the coast was clear they rushed to Monty's quarters, and there they found—Lord George Ingilby.

"Aw—Lepel," he said in his quiet drawl, "I think he's at the main guard—you'll find him there."

The larky young officers noticed that Lord George's servants were carrying bodily away the property that they proposed so seriously to damage. In point of fact, Monty was in-

vited to share his lordship's quarters. This stopped the practical joking. Mr. Scales was not at all the man to "draw" a lord.

Monty found Lord George a charming companion. He was intelligent, amusing, and very amiable. Unfortunately, his health was bad. The wound that he had received gave him much trouble. Erysipelas supervened, and matters became critical. Monty tended him like a nurse. For five nights in succession he had hardly a wink of sleep.

"My dear Lepel," said the invalid one day, "I am very thankful. You are tending a sick man. You are tending a dying man."

"No, you must not say that," said Monty, trying to be cheerful. The wan cheek of the poor sufferer made this difficult.

"You regret being a bas——I mean perhaps not illustrious by birth. My big grievance is all the other way. A lord by courtesy is neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor

good red herring. His class forbids his being a money-maker, and then rejects him because he has made no money. Damme, I'm almost inclined to tell you a lot of things. I want somebody to talk to."

"I wouldn't excite myself——"

"The British noble," pursued Lord George in his sarcastic vein, "is a splendid grandee. He is expected to be as magnificent with his unlet farms as he was before Stephenson and Fulton invented steam locomotion, and the hated Peel free trade. A lord by courtesy is a pantomime peer with sham splendours and joys. His father says, marry Pride, marry Money, but do not marry Love. I fell in love with a maiden of low degree; I was threatened with a line regiment and—Bangalore. I fell in love with a maiden of high degree; her mamma banged her proud doors in my face."

"Literally?"

"Literally. It is the proud boast of the Upper House of Legislature that it possesses

no peer more courteous in word and more arrogant in deed than Lord Odium."

"Lord Odium?"

"Yaas—I don't know that you'll find his name in the Peerage. Lord Odium had a daughter—fathers sometimes have daughters—Lady Vivien, let us call her. Lady Vivien had a mother—a daughter sometimes has a mother."

"Sometimes."

"Lady Odium was the terror of 'detrimentals.' Not one of these worthy but misvalued beings had ever entered Ogre Castle. I met Lady Vivien and fell in love with her—wisely or otherwisely. Lord Odium, and Lady Odium, the beloved wife of the same, were like God Almighty looking down on black-beetles, as the Americans put it. But one day Ardagh, my brother, died, and I became heir to the title and estates. I got engaged to Lady Vivien, and things went merrily enough until one fine morning Lady Ardagh produced

a posthumous child, a boy, who cut me out. Lord Odium—he had the gout at the time—signed a rude letter, written out by a cad, a hanger-on, one Scales—I mean Carbuncle—let us call him Carbuncle. This letter announced that the engagement was at an end. I called for explanations, but was refused admission. Ogre Castle had closed its doors upon me for ever. My story is long. It has bored you. It has bored me."

The poor invalid got worse, and in a few days the regimental surgeon broke to him the intelligence that his days were numbered.

"Lepel," he said, faintly, one night, "here is a key; open my desk."

Monty complied.

"I am too weak to do it myself. Open these two miniatures."

"Here they are."

"One is of a lady. That's it. Seal it up carefully in a packet. You see these letters tied with a blue ribbon? Burn them now."

Monty burnt the letters, and sealed up the miniature. Lady Vivien was the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen.

"Take this for yourself, Lepel," said Lord George, faintly. "It is only a shirt-stud. Some say the diamond is magical. It was looted by my uncle at Lucknow."

Although he did not know it, this gift was the most prominent fact in the life of Captain Lepel, our hero.

"I am very tired," said the poor invalid, turning on his couch. "The little packet—I should like—put in my coffin."

Three days after this the helmet and sword of Lord George Ingilby took a part in a last military pageant; and three rounds of musketry echoed amongst the decayed monuments of the Gibraltar cemetery.

CHAPTER II.

DALLIANCE.

At the age of about fourteen, Monty had loved his cousin Millicent. She was a slim young maiden with pensive eyes. She was beautiful, too — a very delicate style of beauty. One day in the quaint old gardens of Hampton Court, in an avenue of sombre chestnuts that fringed a pond, an imitation of a Dutch canal, Monty had said these words to Millicent:

"I will never love any one but you."

It was a boy speaking to a girl.

The regiment of Monty was sent to Edinburgh; and in that city the young linesman made the acquaintance of Lord

Aveling, who was commanding the Scots Greys there. His lordship was hot-tempered and abrupt at times, but very kind-hearted. He had distinguished himself in the great charge of Balaclava; and being a lord and a hero, was quite entitled to be imperious when thwarted. At his own mess Monty first met his lordship, who took at once a singular liking to the young man; and in a short time, Monty, to his astonishment, was invited to Newton Priors, Lord Aveling's country seat in Cropshire.

That visit was a transformation scene in the pantomime of life.

Not far from Newton Priors dwelt one, Lord Grandison. He and his wife had the reputation of being as proud as the Lord and Lady Odium of Lord George Ingilby. Nobody under a peer's eldest son had ever entered the sacred portals of Cromlech West, his lordship's country seat, an ancient pile, time-honoured, gloomy, with a genuine

barbacan, which still bore the marks of Ireton's cannon balls.

Lord Grandison's eldest son, Lord Barwise, had married Lord Aveling's sister. This family intimacy may account for the phenomenon that I am about to chronicle. Lord Grandison happened to be staying at Newton Priors when Monty arrived there. Cromlech West, as I have said, is only a few miles off. There was to be a shooting-party there in a few days. Lord Aveling asked for an invitation for the young dragoon, forgetting that Lady Grandison, in the matter of "detrimentals," was the most exclusive mamma in Europe. To his astonishment, Monty did receive an invitation to go over and shoot, and stay two nights at Cromlech West. And by an unfortunate accident, Lord Aveling had an attack of rheumatism just as he was about to chaperon the young man to the holy of holies of the proud Malaperts—that was the family name.

Monty, compelled to drive over alone, passed through the awful portals with a trembling similar to that of the Epoptai when they first entered the grim temple of Eleusis. It was the crucial ordeal of a life; it was an illumination; for in Persephone Monty recognised the lady of Lord George Ingilby's miniature.

That night Lord Harold Malapert accompanied him to his bedroom.

"Big and ghastly, ain't it? I hope you're not afraid of ghosts. Several Lord Grandisons have died in that bed; we call it the 'Catafalque.'"

The room was, indeed, of the pattern that might be haunted by ghosts. There was a huge cabinet of ebony, with Ionic columns supported by sculptured female heads. There was a grand chest of drawers; marquetry of wood and ivory, with ormolu mountings. There was a "clavecin" or harpsichord in the corner of the room, of varnished wood

painted with flowers. It had been played on once by a Lady Grandison; but she and it had been mute for one hundred and fifty years. There were several chairs of gloomy black wood, whose legs curved out downwards, and whose arms curved out upwards, like the thrones of Roman emperors. Tapestry of dull green, very faded, hung from the walls, flashing out here a brocaded lady, or there a red huntsman with baldrick and horn. There was a handsome table of Tarsia work. The "Catafalque" was splendid; four heavy posts of ebony supported an enormous roof, with pendent acorns of huge size. By it was a sinister box of black wood, which made one think at first that one of the Lord Grandisons after lying in state, had forgotten to carry away himself and coffin. It proved to be nothing more formidable than a "Cassone," the coffer for a bride's presents in old Italy.

Life—like Dr. Johnson's definition of a

tragedy—is a "poem ending in a death." In this poem, which lacks pleasing jingle with many, are crucial moments of action (the word "drama" means action), and crucial moments of reflection. One such came to Monty as he lay in the gorgeous "Catafalque" where so many Lord Grandisons, like the Delhi emperors, had been "pleased to die."

Two beings had for the first time been confronted to-day. One had descended from the long line of ancestors whose portraits now stared at Monty from the walls. Amongst these, no doubt, were bold rogues and sneaking schemers; but in Damascene armour or Gainsborough velvet they looked sufficiently imposing. They had dowered the Lady Gwendoline with an heredity of honours, and wealth, and stately beauty. The other had emerged from the dregs of society. He had no ancestors—not even a father; and the name of his mother excited whispered derision. Scales and the schoolboys had

called him bastard, and even the amiable Lord George had half uttered this humiliating word. A secret blight seemed to hang round his life; and but for the interposition of the kind brother officer, he would already have been chased back to the gutter from which he had sprung. Dare such a being utter the word "love," even in the secret recesses of his heart? Such a fancy seemed quite enough to make the Malaperts of the picture-frames step out and confront him with battle-maces and falchions.

It is to be remarked that three points were prominent in his present reflections.

The first was the whole story of Lord George Ingilby. A military funeral, when seen for the first time, is a striking spectacle; and the "Dead March" once more was ringing in the young man's ear.

The second point was the well-bred impertinence of the Malapert family generally. It was snubbing exalted into a fine art.

But the third point was the most important of all. For amongst the grim Grandison catafalques and coffin-like "Cassones" there moved the brightest spirit that the young man had yet seen on earth.

The beauty of the Lady Gwendoline was of a very refined type. Her eyes were large and bright, reflecting the many impressions which chased through her too active brain. Her nose was small; her complexion a little too marmoreal; her mouth had the Niobe curve when in repose; her hair was brown with a golden shimmer; her figure was graceful and slender. This was the apparition that surged up before Monty on that particular evening.

"Captain Lepel, for your sins, I suppose, you are fated to take me in to dinner."

Then began a conversation which grew more pleasant every minute. The young man remembered every word of it.

"Do you know, Captain Lepel, I took

you at first for Captain Westenra of the Life Guards — the Blues — I never know regiments. He has just married Lady Clara, and every one is saying how wicked he is."

"What is his crime?"

"He has only got six hundred a year; that is his wickedness."

"Inconceivable."

"Between you and me, I idolise such evil-doers, and so does Lady Clara, evidently."

"That is very wrong of her."

"Ah! Captain Lepel, it is evident that you have never sat in the slave market and seen dear papas and mammas buying and selling." As the young lady said this she glanced in the direction of the worthy Lord Grandison.

"Nobody has ever wanted to buy me, I confess," said Monty.

"I was reading Victor Hugo's 'Les Misérables' this afternoon. I think I shall become a Benedictine. Don't you think it

quite grand to pass twelve hours of the night kneeling on the cold stone, in a chapel, and praying for the sins of the whole world?"

"Well, it is and it isn't."

"Fancy a devotee having always to answer 'Forever,' when spoken to. The devotees in this part of the country say: 'What a fine day.'"

The second occasion on which the pair met was at Newton Priors. Lord Aveling had asked the young officer to come from Edinburgh to a dancing-party. As Monty was whizzing across the southern counties of Scotland and the northern counties of England, he prayed to the gods that the Lady Gwendoline should be at this dance.

He missed his train, and arrived too late for dinner. Dancing was in full swing when his fly drove up. He was shown up to a bedroom, by Combe, the butler. Hastily he put on his evening clothes.

The dance was a small one, confined to the party staying in the house, and a few neighbouring families. The drawing-room had been cleared for action, and some musicians chartered from Dorminster, the cathedral town.

Almost the first person that Monty beheld on entering the room was the Lady Gwendoline. She had on an evening dress of some fluffy white material, and looked very refined and very aristocratic. Nervously he asked for a waltz.

"A quadrille, I think; No. 3."

This answer depressed Monty very much; he took it in the light of a snub, and an accidental circumstance aggravated this impression. Looking round the room, his eyes fell on a lady whom he had known in Edinburgh. Miss Mackenzie of Culcabock set up as an heiress and a beauty, and gave herself many airs and graces in that picturesque but bleak city. She affected dragoons in pre-

ference to infantry; using a cabalistic formula with the latter to accentuate this sentiment.

"A quadrille, thank you."

This, as Monty knew to his cost, taken literally, did not mean that she was especially anxious to dance a quadrille with him. Rather it was a polite—more or less polite—way of intimating that she did not want to dance at all.

The intelligent elephant with his precious ivory, is grouped in natural history with the grunting hog. Was there any natural association between a Lady Gwendoline and a Miss Mackenzie of Culcabock? Two works of art may be quite different in refinement and execution, and yet be both works of art. Miss Mackenzie of Culcabock was well-millinered, astute, mercenary, ill-bred, with one shining virtue, as Monty conceded. She made no attempt to tinsel over her rudeness, and temper the wind to the shorn and close-clipped infantry officer.

And as the days went by—for the Lady Gwendoline was staying at Newton Priors, the depression of the young dragoon increased, rather than diminished. It would be difficult to state, in a word, of what he complained. Lady Gwendoline was of exquisite manners, polished, vivacious, and very natural. She was completely different from Miss Mackenzie of Culcabock. And yet, it was plain to the young officer, on the other hand, that her talk about marriage, and poor soldiers, had not been much more sincere than the desire she had expressed to find herself praying all night on bare knees in a convent, for the sins of the whole world.

How was it that the great Lady Grandison trusted one of her daughters outside the grim battlements of Ogre Castle? To explain this, I must show the close connection between Lady Gwendoline and Lady Barwise, and trench on mighty mysteries.

In days of old, when marchionesses and

dukes wore powder, one of its chief beauties was that often the white hair of age, and the smooth cheek of youth, brought suddenly into contact, produced a certain charm. Some such law accounts, most probably, for the pleasing effect that Lady Barwise produced when you first set eyes on her. She had white hair prematurely. This made her look like a "Marquise," and her pretty manners strengthened the illusion. Her figure was fragile. Her mind was fragile, with an added shrewdness at times. The Lord Barwise that she married was not, of course, the present Lord Barwise. He is Her Majesty's representative at Ispahan. The earlier Lord Barwise was by another mother.

In the view of her rivals, Lady Barwise, in the lottery of marriage, drew the great prize of the year. Lord Barwise was handsome, of pleasant manners—and twenty-two years of age. He was expected to inherit

one of the oldest titles and largest estates in England. His mother, the first Lady Grandison, was the daughter and heiress of Braithwaite, the banker.

But if there is a magic which turns mud into gold, there is also a magic which turns gold into mud. Braithwaite, the banker, possessed the first art, and his grandson, Lord Barwise, the second. He flung his money in handfuls to actresses and racing men; "pink legs and black legs," said the funny Master of Trinity. He was courteous, easy, of excellent intentions. One day he would promise reform to his wife and to the Bishop of Dorminster, who had been his tutor. And the next day he would plunge into new excesses. He was a pleasant young man who could never say "No" to any one in the world; and when he died, his widow passed years in erecting a suitable monument to his honour. It can be seen in the little church of Cromlech West.

Thackeray once started this humorous problem: Would you accept an income of £365,000 a year, on the condition that you always walked about with an agonising little pebble in your boot? Perhaps the little pebble would come with the large income, whether you consented or not. With the male Crœsus this is labelled "gout," with the female, "nerves." Lady Barwise was a confirmed invalid. She had tried many remedies; descending from the orthodox Sir Williams and Sir Georges to globules and Malvern. But all these remedies met with little success. At last came a ray of hope to cheer her.

For at this date came a whisper that caused a thrill in the ears of a select few. In the pages of history, some astute folks had long had a half belief that they could trace the course of a secret society of mighty teachers, who had at their command astounding, miraculous gifts. These adepts, in the

persons of a Paracelsus or a St. Germain, would emerge into the light at times, but only for a second. The whisper that I have alluded to was to the effect that these "Esoteric Brothers" were still in existence, amongst the snows of Thibet. And it was announced that the leading "Adept" had determined to put himself in communication with Europe once more, having selected as a medium of communication a gifted lady named Madame de Puffendorff, who had travelled in those remote regions.

"This Adept, what is his name?" said Lady Barwise, when she heard this story from her friend, Lady Poyntz.

"I don't know that I may tell it you, my dear."

"Oh, please do," said the good lady, in immense excitement.

"Well, then, it's Wung Dumpy."

"Wung Dumpy. Dear me, what a funny name! And what can he do?"

"Tell all the secrets of this world, and the next; explain why folks are unhappy."

"Can he heal diseases?"

"It is whispered in our Inner Lodge, that Colonel Challoner, who had a cork leg, has been restored."

"What is this astounding science?"

"It is called 'Esoteric Brotherism.' Madame de Puffendorff is not always happy in her English."

Why do I tell you all this? Simply because, according to Thackeray, a novel is the "old, old story of a man and a woman;" and the great Wung Dumpy from the cold and calm glaciers of Tartary, is destined to powerfully affect the love affairs of Lady Gwendoline and Captain Montague Lepel.

For on the fifth day of this gentleman's visit to Newton Priors, at the hour of breakfast, when several men in pink, and ladies in pretty collars and waistcoats, were plainly costumed for a neighbouring meet, the

noise of a dog was heard outside the breakfast-room.

"What's that?" said Lord Aveling, whose spare figure looked uncommonly well in breeches and Peel boots.

"The bark is the bark of 'The Beau,'" said Lady Gwendoline, who was doing the honours with the coffee and the tea.

"Your sister cannot be up as early as this." In point of fact, Lady Barwise usually rose about twelve.

But it was Lady Barwise. There could be no doubt about that fact. Neither could there be any mistake about her much barking aide-de-camp.

This dog, who was called "The Beau," had once been a handsome pug; but, like other beaux, he had come to know a period of obesity and the falling-off of charms. Also he had rather a disagreeable ophthalmic affection, which made him, like Polonius, purge amber and plum-tree gum.

"Wonderful news. Doggety, doggums, Cummums, cummums." These words were for the benefit of the dog as well as the company. He had a special language pitched in a certain high key.

"What is it, Julia?" said Lord Aveling.

"She's coming. Cummums, cummums," said Lady Barwise.

"Who?"

"Madame de Puffendorff."

These words caused the noble army of fox-hunters to look up from their eggs and chops. Already this name was whispered mysteriously everywhere.

"Madame de Puffendorff?" said Lord Aveling.

"Yes, Lady Poyntz has persuaded her to visit me."

"Who is Madame de Puffendorff?" said Monty, to Lady Gwendoline.

"Do you really mean to say that you don't know?"

"I do."

"There is only one person that can answer that question," said little D'Eresby of the Guards. "I was in India shooting large game, and I met her. She is immense —can roll up a fresh religion or a fresh cigarette with equal skill. She can perform miracles, and speak six languages colloquially —very colloquially."

"What is this fresh religion that you talk of?" said Lady Gwendoline.

"Well, when I talked with her it was Russian Nihilism, I should say."

"Tell me exactly, what is Nihilism?" said Lady Barwise, who had taken her seat at the table.

"The worship of nothing,"

"But how can you worship nothing?"

"Well, first of all, you must make a fine idol of your 'nothing'—of gold or silver, or even silver-gilt."

"Yes, yes," said Lady Barwise.

"And then you must chant to it imaginary hymns on a make-believe organ." Mr. D'Eresby was a bit of a wit.

"Oh, but I assure you it is different now since she has come across the great Wung Dumpy, the 'Ocean of Unspeakable Qualities.' That is the meaning of his name."

"Yes, she told me that, Lady Barwise."

"He aims to spiritualise London," said the good lady in continuation; "it is the great stronghold of what he calls the Elementary Spirits, the 'demons' of the priests."

"Just so," said little D'Eresby, "but I still maintain that 'Brotherism' does not believe in a God."

"By the word God, I suppose you mean an intelligent God," said Miss Hislop, an heiress who affected male shooting-jackets and caps, and stuck at no bullfinches in theological or hunting fields.

"Just so."

"I deny that 'Natura naturans' is intelligent."

"That is a strong statement," said Lord Aveling, shocked. He liked to see theological opinions marched to church in accurate uniform.

"By-the-bye," said Mr. D'Eresby, "at Ramnugger, was there not a wee bit of an —affair?"

"Oh," said Lady Barwise in some excitement, "Lady Poyntz has explained all that, and it is most interesting. The Elementary Spirits have become alarmed at this threatened invasion of their stronghold, and, headed by a wicked spirit named Gimbo, they are very active. They get up false evidence by magical means. They put wicked thoughts into the mind of one of Madame de Puffendorff's servants."

"And when do you expect her?" said Miss Hislop.

"This very day, if her 'guru' will allow her to travel."

All through the day there was great excitement both amongst those who hunted and those who stayed at home. A little before dinner-time there was a loud ring at the door-bell. All crowded to the drawing-room.

But the new-comer was not Madame de Puffendorff but Lord Grandison, who had come on business, not quite seasonably.

Lord Grandison's nose and hair were curly, the latter being chiefly confined to a tuft at the back of the head. This head was as smooth and shiny as a billiard ball; and electricity or some such force seemed to cause his moustache, his Wellington whisker, and even his eyebrows to become fly-away, straggling, tangential. It was at once the fortune and misfortune of this rubicund, irritable, shrewd, active human being that he was born a peer's eldest son. As Lord

Barwise he entered the House of Commons as Member for Rottingdean, and soon caught that malarious fever whose symptoms are gold embroidery, stars, ribbons red and blue. But in the middle of this whirl he was suddenly transferred to another and a better world; and he found the beryl and chalcedony City of the Cloudland much—much too peaceful. As Lord Barwise he could intrigue, scheme, and attack his rivals in eloquent speeches, for he had a fluent tongue; but in the House of Lords he had for sole audience a drowsy bishop or two, and Lords Hatchment and Catafalque, two ambitious politicians who had obtained Nirvana like himself.

Lord Grandison was accompanied on this occasion by a Colonel Prospectus, who had once been a dragoon, but had since dabbled in City transactions. He was a hanger-on of Lord Grandison's, giving him advice, sometimes good, sometimes—indifferent.

"I thought you were Madame," said Lady Barwise, when his lordship entered the room.

"Who said damn?" Lord Grandison was painfully deaf.

"We are expecting Esoteric Brotherism," said the lady.

"Which Botherism?" said the peer; and his remark for once was not so very inappropriate.

CHAPTER III.

"BROTHERISM."

"AT last, at last we meet." The door-bell had rung a second time.

Madame de Puffendorff was a short lady, very stout, very lethargic, very waddly in her walk. Her eyes were very small and usually half closed. Perhaps it was the contrast between her fat, sleepy manner and the unexpected and astounding remarks that she was in the habit of giving vent to, that struck a stranger most. Her costume, a sort of dressing-gown, of sombre stuff, contrasted with the costumes of the other ladies, for dinner was over. But this contrast seemed to give the foreign lady little concern.

"Madam, I am in retard," she said to

Lady Barwise; "I miss to experience an accident in the train."

"An accident. Dear me!" said Lord Aveling.

"Hey? What? An accident?" said Lord Grandison, who caught, as usual, a word or two of what was going on.

"Ah, no, no, no; I escape the accident," said Madame de Puffendorff.

"Where was the accident?" said Lord Grandison, speaking with the deaf man's voice.

"At Morton Junction, I hear these words: 'Get out of the 5.54 Parliamentary.' recognise that voice."

"All this is too, too interesting," said Lady Barwise.

"Who was it?" said Lord Aveling.

"It was Wung Dumpy," said the Russian lady, this time with much mystery.

"Wung Dumpy. Oh, how intensely exciting," said the impressible Lady Barwise.

"At Wung Dumpy. Where's that?" said the deaf Lord Grandison.

"It's the name of a man," said Colonel Prospectus.

"A man, no. More than a man," said Madame de Puffendorff.

"On which line?" said the deaf peer.

"Wung Dumpy is the Ocean of Unspeakable Qualities," said Lady Barwise, explaining.

"Ocean?"

"Yes; ocean."

"Ocean. The Dorminster line don't go near the sea."

"But, madame, can you account for this miraculous warning?" said Miss Hislop.

"Ah, that is the secret of the Unspeakable," said the Russian lady, in rather a matter-of-fact tone.

"The Unspeakable! What is that?"

"Ah! to those who have not the faculty, how can I tell?"

"But," said Lady Barwise, "a miraculous warning would not come all the way from Thibet——"

"Ze Brothers propose to spread the lightenment. Zis time-honoured island is a victim of the superstition, of the ignorance. Ze poor, starving artisan is bound hand and foot by the bishop, the beefeater—what shall I say? Ze Brothers propose to give the lightenment to the bishop and the beefeater as well as the artisan—to teach the teacher. But the lower denizens of the spirit world oppose this. In particular, there is an Elementary Spirit——"

"Yes, yes, yes—called Gimbo—I know," said Lady Barwise, much interested.

"Ah, miladi, you have ze secret of ze Unspeakable. I look—I look—you are illuminous."

"Who's luminous?" said Lord Grandison.

"Lady Barwise," said Colonel Prospectus, who was finding it a little difficult to explain

the secret of the Unspeakable to a deaf man.

"Ze Elementary Spirit called Gimbo, him know that miladi will be a column in the cause. He know that she will aid the Sostentation Fond of the Brothers with her plenty; therefore he try to wreck the train, to keep me from miladi. We were warned by the telegraph and got out."

"What's all that?" said Lord Grandison.

"They were warned by the telegraph and got out in time," said Colonel Prospectus.

"But if the station-master had intelligence of the coming accident, why did he not warn the other passengers?"

"It was the spiritual telegraph, milord."

"What, what?" said the deaf nobleman, making an ear-trumpet with his hand.

"The line is laid from Lha Sa to London."

"Line of telegraph from Warsaw to

London. What's that got to do with it?" said the peer.

"Ze eye of ze spirit, miladi," said Madame de Puffendorff, suddenly turning away from Lord Grandison, and putting on a look of abstraction, "ze eye of ze spirit knows not time. Two hundred — three hundred thousand years ago, this county of Cropshire was ice like Greenland. It was what *la géologie* call the glacial period. Ice, ice, cold, cold—I see him now. But before this period of ice there was *humanité* in England, before the Great Britons there were yellow Mongolians, Euskarians — thus they say. In the cave of the Dordogne we find an actual picture of ze primitif man scratched on a reindeer's horn."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Hislop; "I was reading of that yesterday. It was executed, I read, at least 244,000 years ago."

"He is hairy and naked. He has the fangs of the gorilla and walks not upright.

Ze eye of ze spirit knows not time. I see him here in Cropshire now."

"Most extraordinary and immensely interesting," said Lady Barwise.

"Man, as we knew before, is a monkey, quadrumanous, with a rudimentary tail."

"Yes, yes; we've all studied our Darwin —of the genus 'Primate,'" said Miss Hislop.

"Zat is true. I see the 'Primate' holding on to ze branch by his tail, and catching the *noisette*—what you say?—ze cocoa-nut."

"What's that?" said Lord Grandison.

"She says she's seen the 'Primate' holding on to a branch by his tail, and grabbing cocoa-nuts," Colonel Prospectus explained.

"What, the Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"Ze picture of ze man," said Madame de Puffendorff, ignoring explanations this time; "ze picture scratched on the reindeer's horn 244,000 years ago, is the only true picture of a man yet painted. Wherefore for why? Because it draws a monkey.

Humanité was a monkey 244,000 years ago. *Humanité* is a monkey now. And civilisation has made but one little gain in all these years. It has learnt to play ze little *comédie* and pretend that ze ape is not zere."

"A comedy," said Lady Barwise.

"Certainly thus, for what is ze *comédie*? To play a rôle which we know is a bosh—I mean a simulation. We teach the young miss to avoid 'le Shocking.' We say, 'My dear, you are a baboon. You have the rudimentary tail, but you must hide him. You are quadrumanous, you have four hands; you must hide two of them in boots with very high heels, and call them feet. It is the law of the baboon world that a proper-minded young lady-baboon should try to get more sweet *noisettes*, more sweet mangoes, more fine rags, more fine tinsel than her sister baboons, for that makes them much unhappy. But you are an animal, remember, with one solitary initiation—monkey-tricks.'"

"But then the illuminati—Wung Dumpy, for instance—are monkeys too," said Miss Hislop.

"Ha, that is it; but you seek to cherish the baboon, we seek to destroy him."

It is to be confessed that Lord Grandison was terribly puzzled with all this; but his bewilderment was destined to wax rather than wane, for Madame de Puffendorff, suddenly springing up in her chair, closed her eyes as in rapt extasia and gave three little screams. She then placed her left hand tightly across her eyes.

"The light, the light, the light," she murmured, dreamily.

"Leave her quite—quite alone," said a solemn voice; "it is the Presence."

All turned to the speaker. It was a native of India, with a turban and a dark purple robe. Silently he had entered the apartment. He looked very frail, very slight, and a trifle subdued.

"Is she in what is called a lucid state?" said Lady Barwise.

"Not a word, or she may be much injured," said the native. "It is the Presence."

"What, Wung——" said Miss Hislop.

"Hush," said the Indian.

"Hush," said the company.

"I like him," murmured the foreign lady; and pressing her hand tightly over her eyes, she advanced across the room close up to Lord Grandison, "a fourth rounder, I admire him."

"What, what?" said the astonished noble.

"Hush, hush," said every one.

"He is petulant but brave, narrow but trustworthy." Here the lady put her hand softly on the shiny bald head of the peer.

"Hey, what the devil——I mean—take care, madame."

"She is establishing the *rapport*. Wung Dumpy may tell him much."

"Oh, yes, let her establish the *rapport*," said Lady Barwise, seconding the native. "She may tell him his past lives."

"A mortal accustomed to eminence—accustomed to domination—long—long. He has been a proconsul in Syria, a king in Egypt, and his *momie* is now at Grand Cairo—I see him, I see him."

"How interesting," said Lady Barwise.

"He has been a colonel under Malbrouk, a *boxeur*, hence his courage. He has been a cave man eating nuts, eating his foes, but still a chieftain. He has been a nabob in India, a cardinal in Spain, a master of the *cérémonie*; and the 'karma' of all this make him elegant but imperious."

"Wonderful, wonderful," said Lady Barwise. "And to think that thus through the ages our amelioration goes on by these rebirths. 'Karma' accounts for both our good and our evil proclivities."

"I fail to see that," said Miss Hislop.

"We know that there is a large law of heredity. A drinks because A's father died of delirium tremens. But if, say Swedenborg or even St. Paul, were to be reborn like A, each would without doubt be a drunkard too. If there is a law of amelioration by rebirths, it is stultified by a more potent law—amelioration by heredity; in the main, a very beneficent law, as we all know."

"Perhaps in the next world A could choose a suitable father for his next rebirth," said Lady Barwise.

"Then it would be amelioration by heredity still," said Miss Hislop. "Besides, how do we know that Lord Grandison was once a mummy in Egypt?"

"By ze *miracle*," said a voice, suddenly, in a very matter-of-fact, quiet, business sort of way.

All turned towards Madame de Puffendorff, who stood in the middle of the room, gazing upwards.

"What, what?" said Lord Grandison.

"Hush."

"All religions, they commence by the *miracle*," said the foreign lady. "Wung Dumpy he say zat he will show ze *miracle*."

"How intensely interesting," said Lady Barwise.

"On a dressing-table upstairs is a diamond shirt-stud. Who owns?"

"I have such a stud," said Monty, aroused by this abrupt question.

"Wung Dumpy he bring him through the *plafond*—see."

Here the foreign lady held up her hand. A second afterwards she displayed Monty's diamond shirt-stud to the bewildered gaze of the community.

During this visit to Newton Priors, the young dragoon had experienced exquisite torture. In hunts, in drives, in walks, the Lady Gwendoline was each day very, very

near him, and at the same time very, very far off. As Lady Barwise was an invalid, who had elected of her own free will to be helpless and picturesquely effete, the younger lady managed the large and luxurious establishment. She issued the invitations, ordered the dinners, and generally supervised the vast army of servants that marched to a sort of church parade every morning, with Lord Aveling for chaplain. We are taught by transcendental thinkers, that the main duty of man is to cut himself clear of his appetites and mean ambitions—to emerge from the ego to a great "Outside Ourselves." This by some is labelled "God"; but one subtle thinker has lately called it "Love."

The affection of a young man for a young woman is, no doubt, the mighty mystery of human life. But, like other "mysteries," its portals are beset with evil shapes. These with Monty took the form of a fierce hate and a furious jealousy of all

the young men of fortune who came near Lady Gwendoline. And the special object of his animosity was little D'Eresby. This gentleman was one day to be a baronet, with a fortune of some twenty thousand a year. Besides these accomplishments, he sang funny little songs on the banjo after dinner, with no voice but much humour. Lady Gwendoline seemed certainly to be amused by him. And there was another aggravating fact. Monty had lost a hundred pounds to him at poker, and did not well know how to pay it.

And I must say that the unexpected arrival of the Right Honourable Lord Grandison, K.G., failed to bring an increase of calm to the mind of Monty. The Right Honourable gentleman failed completely to remember his former guest; and he did this in quite a stern, emphatic manner. The result was that our hero, instead of taking full advantage of the sublime revelations that the

Ocean of Unspeakable Qualities was unfolding for the benefit of an English "Baboon-world," all through the evening was planning a hasty retreat from Newton Priors.

"Lady Gwendoline, I must say 'good-bye' to-night; I start early to-morrow morning."

"Not at all; we can't spare you yet."

"So very sorry, but when we take the Queen's shilling——"

"No, no; I want specially to speak to you." And on the face of the lady there was a little blush.

CHAPTER IV.

BUBBLES.

A BUBBLE is a miniature globe, more brightly coloured than some globes we have cognisance of. The world was radiant to Monty all through the night.

A daughter of a Pharoah does not, of course, make love like an ordinary mortal. A little relaxation of stately dignity with such would mean more than the raptures of some less exalted Chloe. Love was a strange thing. Had not Madame de Puffendorff, in her wisdom, announced that the astute mother-baboon always taught her daughter at once how to snare the male love, and to appear ignorant that male love and even males existed?

Had the changed manner of Lady Gwendoline anything to do with the diamond shirt-stud, magically brought into the drawing-room by Wung Dumpy? Did she recognise it? Did she want any information about its last owner? She might desire this; but how would she set about acquiring it? Perhaps Lord George Ingilby had completely misread her.

Matters never turn out quite as we expect. Monty woke up very early, and as he tossed about in one of the comfortable beds of Newton Priors he counted the hours to breakfast-time. The enigma puzzled him.

But Lady Gwendoline at breakfast, and indeed all through the morning, seemed quite to have forgotten that she had something very important to communicate. Indeed, nothing was talked about except Madame de Puffendorff. That lady was unable to come down to breakfast. This was announced by the frail, rickety native;

his name was Chupatty. Breakfast was sent up to her room, an Indian mess called "Kedgeree," which the rickety native had helped to concoct in the kitchen.

Once Monty caught Lady Gwendoline in a corner of the drawing-room.

"You have something to tell me."

"Have I?"

"I understood you to say so last night."

"Last night," said the lady, a little flippantly. "What wonderful things took place last night. Don't you think so, Miss Hislop?"

"I am afraid that I am not 'illuminous,'" said Miss Hislop; "but more wonderful things have been revealed this morning."

"What things?" said Monty, who was a little sulky.

"It is announced that the dog Beau was once a great dandy and master of the ceremonies at Bath; his name is suppressed. There he jilted Lady Barwise in her last

existence, and married a rich widow. The 'Karma' of this mean action causes him now to follow her about in the guise of a pug, who barks at poverty, and weeps with sore eyes."

"Can you believe such stuff?" said Monty.

"To those who have not the faculty how can I tell?" said Miss Hislop, facetiously repeating the words of the foreign lady, with a tolerable mimicry.

After lunch matters mended.

"Would you like a drive in the pony carriage, Captain Lepel?" said Lady Gwendoline, in a pretty driving costume.

"With you? Most much."

"I'm not so sure of that; I'm going to distribute jelly and port wine. You will be awfully bored."

"Why should I be bored?"

"I don't know. Soldiers usually are, unless they are killing something—killing time."

"I'll get you to write my epitaph. First he just killed time, and then time just killed him."

"Get in," said the lady, taking the reins.

"It is very meritorious of you to drive about like this."

"That's the only thing that cannot with truth be said of it. With Lady Bountiful, nowadays, these drives are merely routine—a part of the great *comédie*."

"What *comédie*?"

"I am afraid you were asleep last night when Madame de Puffendorff was revealing the great Secret of the Unspeakable."

"No, I wasn't."

"What she said was very true. We are of the baboon family; and the great comedy of life is to hide that fact. But the struggle for the *noisette* is the great duty of man, according to modern teaching. I'm seriously thinking of joining the 'Brotherism.'"

"The brotherhood of Cagliostro."

"Just so. Cagliostro succeeds with his sham magic and mystery. Why? Simply because there is an echo in our hearts that tells us that a world of wonder is around us."

"I distrust that echo."

"'The enlightened view both worlds,'" said the lady, quoting Mirza the Sufi; "'but the bat flieth about in the darkness without seeing.'"

"Poor bat."

"Soldiers travel about with their eyes shut, I know; you must have seen at Gibraltar — I think you said you were at Gibraltar."

"Did I? I have been quartered there."

"Ha, just so," said the lady in a musing tone. "Have you ever read Balzac's 'Seraphita'?" she added a little inconsequently.

"No."

"It is a mystical book, based on the

teachings of Swedenborg, whom the French wit admired as much as I admire 'Seraphita.'"

"Tell me about it."

"It deals with what Swedenborg calls the opening of the 'interiors,' allowing the spirit to conquer the clay. Man in his development must go through three worlds. First, the World of Self, whose pæans are sounded by so many modern writers; it is the struggle for the *noisette*, and baboons military, baboons political, and baboons scientific have been very ingenious in this stage."

"Witness the Bonaparte baboon, the George Stephenson baboon."

"Then comes the World of Others, the philanthropists, the prophets, the teachers. They seek to emerge from the world of self. In the third stage, the 'interiors' are opened, and man converses with angels in the Divine World. Buddha, St. Paul, Swedenborg, had reached this stage."

"But Swedenborg was supposed to have miraculous powers, was he not?"

"The powers of the divine world, yes."

"Do you believe that?"

"Have we not seen a miracle lately ourselves?" said the lady, with a funny look. "Here is a pony," she added, "who also wants to show us some conjuring tricks."

"Have you driven him much?" said Monty, who did not like the look of the beast.

"No, he was sent on trial yesterday; Colonel Prospectus heard of him."

"I don't feel the least inclination to go out into the desert like St. Anthony, or sit under the Bo-tree like Buddha. I think we are placed here to enjoy God's gifts; to marry and be given in marriage."

"Ah! there you open up great questions," said Lady Gwendoline, with a pretty pout. "If you read Balzac's 'Seraphita' you will see that Swedenborg's 'celestial marriages'

are the only real marriages. Here is Mrs. Saunders. Her husband lost a limb in the service of his country. He drinks and beats her with his wooden leg. This, I conceive, was not a celestial marriage."

"In the terrestrial marriages, especially in high life, the element of love is now completely eliminated."

"Love, love, love," said the lady, with a wry face; "it is more important that you pass me now that Bovril, those grapes, that port wine."

As Monty sat alone in the pony-carriage he pondered over the events of the morning. Was there a second version of the story of Lord George Ingilby? It seemed to him that Lady Gwendoline had asked him to come out to question him about the diamond shirt-stud. Had she changed her mind?

Before they could distribute any more Bovril or port wine, on that particular afternoon, they were destined to have an

adventure. The pony was uncertain of temper as well as nervous. The road at one point skirted the Dorminster railway, being separated only by a paling. When the pony-carriage was some way along this road an engine screamed in a neighbouring tunnel. The pony got very frightened indeed. Monty jumped out to hold his head. It was plain that the train would be upon them before they could get quit of the dangerous bit of road. Out rushed an express, hissing, and screaming, and steaming. This made the little beast quite frantic. It began to struggle, and rear, and plunge. Monty held on to his head as best he might.

"Get out, get out," he cried.

"No, no, I shall stick to the ship," said Lady Gwendoline, with considerable courage.

The situation was appalling. The young officer felt that it would be quite impossible to control the frantic little animal much

longer. And if it broke away a catastrophe was certain.

"Get out, get out, for God's sake."

It was well that the lady was persuaded to move at last, for the pony succeeded in tumbling Monty into the dust, and, as the carriage dashed past, the wheel struck his leg.

"Are you much hurt?" said a voice that was very gentle.

"Not at all; we must catch the pony."

Monty attempted to move but the pain was too great. His face was deadly pale.

"No, no; you must be perfectly quiet. Lean on me. Try to reach that bank."

"We can't be vanquished by that silly little animal."

"Yes, but you must keep quiet or you'll faint."

"It's all very ridiculous."

"You have saved my life at the risk of

your own. There is nothing ridiculous in that."

"And nothing meritorious," said the young man, bitterly; "you ought to live and I ought to die."

"What do you mean by that?" Her manner was very sympathetic.

"Those that have no one to care for them are not wanted."

"How do you know that you have no one to care for you, Monty Lepel?"

At this moment a butcher's cart came up. Lady Gwendoline asked the butcher to drive Monty to Newton Priors.

That house was in a state of great excitement, for the mysterious Wung Dumpy, from his mountain home, had transmitted some new revelations. It was announced that the union between Lady Barwise and her deceased spouse was of the pattern that is permanent, and not of the more common pattern that too soon develops

symptoms of decay. The late Lord Barwise was a "fifth rounder." He was a general under Jovian at Gadastana in Galatia; an Inca in Peru; a bowman of unerring aim at the battle of Agincourt. He kicked the Beau at Bath, for jilting miladi; and he kicked the Beau at Newton Priors, thus giving him a double dose of "Karma." In all these existences he had a beautiful and virtuous spouse, the present Lady Barwise. The pair had been Christian martyrs together, A.D. 174. And as a troubadour, Lord Barwise had penned plaintive ditties to his lady love in old Provence.

The accident that had happened to the pony-carriage caused great excitement at Newton Priors. Lady Barwise, always fussy and always kind, insisted on sending for Dr. Flack, the village practitioner, who dressed the wound and ordered the patient to keep to his bedroom. Lord Grandison, deaf to many things in the outside world,

did not hear of the accident until after dinner.

"Where's Mr.—I forget his name?" he said, to Lady Barwise, in the drawing-room.

"Do you mean Captain Lepel?"

"Just so. Bell—Bell. Where's Captain Bell?"

"He's had a severe sprain or strain. I want him to try occultism, a marvellous remedy. I speak from experience. In this I was backed up by Doggety, doggums."

"Doctor Doggums — funny name. Did he come from London?"

"Doggety, doggums is the Beau here. He says he must be cured by an occultist."

"An occulist."

"No! an occultist."

"Yes, I hear—an occulist. I thought he had sprained his ankle."

"Yes, a very bad sprain."

"I don't altogether like the look of Mr.

What's-his-name," his lordship suddenly said in a voice intended to be confidential; but the confidential voice of a deaf person is sometimes heard all over the room.

"Oh, don't say that."

"Wasn't it his diamond stud that was brought down the other night?"

"By Wung Dumpy—yes."

"He might have helped the conjuring lady for a bit of fun, you know."

"Hush, hush. There is Captain Lepel."

Monty, against the advice of his doctor, had come in, helped by a manservant.

"Yes, Captain Bell, I think he assisted. Once with Houdin I found my watch in a plum-pudding, when I thought it was still in my pocket."

"Captain Lepel is in the room."

"A confederate—yes, he picked my pocket. That's the way it's done."

This awkward little incident was fortunately put an end to by the entry of Madame

de Puffendorff. Lady Barwise rushed up to her. A letter had been promised from Wung Dumpy, in answer to a letter from her ladyship.

This was the letter of Lady Barwise :

"Will the great occultist tell us whether twin souls ever recognise each other in Kamaloka?"

This letter had been carefully sealed up and placed in a Japanese vase covered with dragons. All this had been explained to the party.

Now, whether Madame de Puffendorff, having arrived silently in the back drawing-room, had heard what Lord Grandison was saying with her natural ears, or whether she learnt his doubts by more "occult" means, will never now be known. Marching straight up to the part of the room where he was sitting, she said with much friendliness :

"The *sceptique*, I lof him."

These words were addressed to the entire

company, but a slight wave of the hand indicated the particular *sceptique* upon whom her love had descended.

"What's that, what's that?" said the *sceptique*, puzzled.

"The *sceptique* he is Archbishop of Cantorbery to-day. The *croyant* take his teaching after forty years. The *croyant* is vegetable, a cabbage, a spinach."

"I don't quite hear," said Lord Grandison, making an ear-trumpet of his hand.

"She says you're a spinach, I mean a *sceptique*."

This explanation of Lady Barwise failed to make matters quite intelligible to his lordship. But the attention of the party was now turned to something far more exciting.

For Madame de Puffendorff, as on a previous occasion, was suddenly seized with the "furia" of the sibyl. She sprang from her chair and gave little screams. She pressed

her hands against her eyes, which were blinded, she said, with astral light.

"Ze little *miracle*—he come."

"Hey, what does she say?" said Lord Grandison.

"She's going to perform a miracle," said Lady Barwise.

"Can she put my watch into a plum-pudding?"

But the miracle was of a different nature. Wung Dumpy actually sent from Thibet an answer to Lady Barwise's letter. He announced that in "Kamaloka" marriage was an union of bodies, not souls. But this materialism was tempered with what the Westerns called "romance." What was "romance"? It was the remembered experience of other existences. It was the "Karma" of lovers who in other bodies had got beyond the baboon-love. Affinities do not remember their past lives here. Witness the "twin souls" brought together to-day.

"Twins, twins—what twins?" said the deaf lord.

"Twin souls," said Lady Barwise.

"Exactly so—'twins,' I hear. The only twins that I know of in this division of the county are Charles and Ezekiel Simcox, the blacksmith's boys."

But at this moment the assembled guests at Newton Priors were destined to experience a new excitement.

The magnetic trance is said to be catching. In any case, suddenly the Lady Gwendoline, who was quite tired out by the excitements of the day, turned deadly pale. Her lips assumed the curve of the marble Niobe. Her eyes seemed to stare beyond the mean and material present. Her calm beauty, appalling as well as amazing, seemed intensified one hundredfold.

"She is fainting," said Miss Hislop.

"No, no, not, it is *lucidité*," said the

foreign lady. "She can tell us now the name of her twin soul."

"His name," said the lady, in a soft whisper, "his name is—Death."

CHAPTER V.

MORE MARVELS.

In this digression I have tried to sketch Captain Lepel. It is time to come back to the two lovers whom we left sitting on the stairs at Lord Aveling's house in Grosvenor Square.

"Who is this Indian, Jeswunt Sirdar?" said the gentleman.

"More occultism."

"Is he of the Puffendorff gang?"

"Not at all, not at all; Lady Poyntz unearthed him, and he is altogether different from the old witch. She always made me laugh. This Indian makes me feel horribly creepy."

"What a pity it is," said Monty, "that

Lady Barwise goes in for all this juggling nonsense!"

As these words were uttered, an Indian emerged through the doorway near which they were sitting. His dress was half Anglicised: a black coat, long, and buttoned with a row of small buttons in the chest. A gray turban neatly folded was on his head. He marched straight up to the young Englishman and minutely inspected his breast.

Lady Gwendoline was aghast. The advent of the Indian was so sudden, and his appearance so sinister, that the idea came into her mind that Jeswunt Sirdar had heard the conversation, and was seeking in the breast of the utterer a convenient spot in which to plunge some cruel Indian dagger, as wavy and as poisonous as a serpent.

A somewhat similar notion crossed the mind of the young man.

"Young Feringhy," said the Indian, after a pause, "may I look at that stone?"

"My shirt stud—well, I can't well take it off."

"Do you know that this is a stone of the rarest properties? It is the Cobra Diamond!"

"Is it?" said the young dragoon, flippantly.

"Ha!" said the Indian, with a little laugh. "Thank you much, for allowing me to see it. I must be off. Lady Barwise has asked me to give a little exposition of the laws of spirit."

In point of fact, chairs and benches were ranged along the large drawing-room, and a table and a glass of water set out for Jeswunt Sirdar. By-and-by, the company crowded into this, and the back drawing-room; and the Indian commenced his address in this fashion.

"The West," he said—"I allude to its

most prominent thinkers—now utterly disbelieves in soul, spirit, anything outside matter and animal life. The East, on the other hand, disbelieves in materialism. It says that this world is a dead world; and an animal, a mere bundle of chemicals, without the action of the spirit world. In one or two water-buckets and a few small phials, the component parts of a given individual could be placed by his side. Lord Aveling has asked me to talk to you about spirit, and give you some evidence of its action. But if you expect any miracles or conjuring tricks from me, you are doomed to disappointment. Certain mysterious beings in Tibet are said to prove the action of spirit, by shuffling about brooches and breakfast-cups. I know nothing about Tibet, and the Mahatmas of Tibet know nothing about India.

"The difficulties in the way of showing the action of spirit consist in this, that it is far more easy to exhibit its action to an individual,

than a body of people. But this need not discourage us. If you will select the most prominent misbeliever amongst your party, I think I could demonstrate to him that the laws of matter, as accepted by the scientific world in England, by no means exhaust all known laws. The testimony of such a misbeliever would, of course, have its weight with you."

Here the lecturer paused, as if expecting a "prominent misbeliever" to step up to the platform. But no prominent misbeliever came.

"No one responds," said the lecturer. He spoke very calmly, with a little of the Indian accent, but with considerable command over the English language. "I am not astonished. There is a gentleman present that I have never seen before." Here Monty pricked up his ears, and Lady Gwendoline became also very attentive. "That gentleman, within my hearing, has expressed

opinions extremely hostile to the genuineness of any occult demonstrations that I may attempt. He has characterised all such as jugglery and fraud. I do not quarrel with him for that. From the point of view of materialism, this is a logical necessity. That gentleman would be a valuable witness. Will he come here? I allude to you, sir!" These last words were addressed to Monty.

"Do, Monty, there's a good fellow," said Lord Aveling, coming forward.

"Yes, do go up," said Lady Gwendoline, who was seated next to him.

"I don't know what you want of me," said Monty, addressing the Indian.

"Your testimony. Is it not that of a confessedly hostile witness?"

"You want to prove to me, as I understand it, that certain demonstrations—I think that is the word—are genuine."

"I have never seen you before," said the Indian, with irritating coolness. "If

I can disclose to you your past, your present, and your future in a flash—a vision—what would you say?"

"A man under such circumstances, I suppose, would say that you had discovered all about my present and my past, and made a shot at the future."

"But your inner life—we all of us have an inner life—supposing that by the aid of what Europe calls Clairvoyance, I disclose that to you, and prove perhaps that your ideal of that inner life is not quite correct. Will you sit down here?"

"Yes, do go," said Lord Aveling; "this is most interesting."

To go on this platform, was the very last thing that Monty wished to do. Lord Grandison was present, and Lord Grandison proclaimed everywhere that he was a confederate in the Puffendorff conjuring tricks. Little D'Eresby also was present, and Miss Hislop, and many other fashionable people.

Whatever occurred, he was sure to be set down as a conjurer's assistant. He went up to the table with a very bad grace.

The Indian took the young man's hand, and, almost in an instant, the room seemed to fade away, and he seemed to stand in the drawing-room of The Lilacs, at Wandsworth. Whether this was in a dream or whether the vision was concrete, he could not say. The room was like the old room, and unlike. It was furnished with much greater taste, and on the walls were bold drawings, hasty studies in oils by Jack. He recognised his style, although it had much improved. There were also clever flower studies in water-colour, the work, as he guessed, of Maud. This young lady, with her flesh tints even more delicate than when last he saw her, was standing up as a model, and Jack at an easel was giving a few more touches to a big picture, framed and apparently quite finished. The subject

chosen was Goldsmith and the "Jessamy Bride," the beautiful Mary Horneck.

Monty advanced and scanned it. By his side was Millicent, looking more dreamy and ethereal than ever, and also much more beautiful. As the young dragoon stood beside her in that old room he felt two emotions, long strangers to his breast: content and calm.

Suddenly the door flew open and Mr. Huxtable came in. He was looking grayer than when Monty last saw him, but hale and cheerful.

"Congratulate me, father," said the artist; "old Sample is on the hanging committee. He likes the work immensely, and advises me to send it in."

"Dear me, dear me! He has seen it?"

"Yes, and Amy's father says that if it is hung, there shall be no more obstacles in the way." This last speech was spoken in a low tone, but Monty caught the words. Jack,

he knew, had long been engaged to Miss Amy Greatorex. But Mr. Greatorex, senior, had rather a habit of viewing marriage more as a business partnership than an union of souls. He was a sugar refiner.

"And now I have something to tell you all," said the father, in his turn. "Glad to see you, Monty; you must congratulate me too. In our La Plata emerald mine we have discovered a new vein. This means that the shares have risen suddenly from five to seventy premium. Our fortunes are made."

This scene, the old villa of The Lilacs, and its old inmates, active, hard-working, contented, had a great effect upon Monty. The presence, too, of Millicent had an indefinable influence. Suddenly by some new magic he seemed to stand alone with her. To his surprise he found himself standing by the old Dutch canal, in Hampton Court, in the very spot that he remembered of

yore. Forgotten words were again sounding in his brain :

"I will never love any one but you!" They came forth almost involuntarily from his lips.

He sought to take her hand.

There was a mocking laugh.

"Have you forgotten the Lady Vivien of Lord George Ingilby?"

A transformation scene had taken place, and Lady Gwendoline stood before him.

"We are not lovers. We are *rivals!*" the voice continued.

"What do you mean?" stammered out the young man.

"You have been befooled. Who is Mr. Lepel, your Indian uncle? Simply Lord Aveling, of whom you are the natural son. Our interests are apart. We both seek his money. I am engaged to marry him!"

Here loud, mocking laughter seemed to

come from the spectators, the Lord Harolds and Lady Fannys, the fops and grandees.

"Do you not know," pursued the phantasm, "that there are two distinct worlds, the world of the Abject, and the Great Kingdom of Arrogance? You have no name, title, fortune. You belong to the world of the Abject, keep your proper place."

Again there came a peal of mocking laughter from the fashionable spectators, and to his horror, Monty saw that the Lady Fannys and Lord Harolds had now the heads of the beasts that typify conceit and arrogance, and greed and lust. They were peacocks, and jays, and mocking-birds. They were hyenas, and wolves, and rats.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PEACOCK'S BLOOD.

Monty is in a handsome bedroom in Grosvenor Square. He is seated at a writing-table, smoking a cigar whose price I should not like to write down. It is plain that his drawers and desk have been ransacked, for objects of price are scattered about together with clothes, jewels, dunning letters. In front of him are three articles: an open letter, a coloured photograph of Gwendoline, and the pretty little jade bottle of Peacock's Blood. He eyes these curiously, and his haggard looks and foppish costume, a splendid smoking suit of maroon velvet, match lamely. The present age is said by writers of all nations to be the age of discontent. Man's

God has been changed to an unintelligent "Energy." Man's dreams have become material, gross, brief. A vast despondency is creeping over Europe.

Let us take the liberty to read the letter which the young dragoon has placed conspicuously before his gaze. It is written by Mr. Huxtable:

"My dear Monty,

"I have bad news for you. Your uncle Lepel has had misfortunes in his recent ventures; he cannot pay over any money just now. I will come over to-morrow and talk to you about it.

"Silas Huxtable."

This letter, which Monty found when he left the heated party, has now a tremendous significance. It seems to bridge the world of dreams, visions, nightmares, and the world of fact.

I must mention that when Monty left his seat by the side of the Hindoo, he found an opportunity of speaking to his host.

"I want to ask you a question, Lord Aveling," he said, solemnly. "Is there such a person as my uncle Lepel?"

"Naturally. Has he not done you many a good turn? How clever is that fellow Jeswunt Sirdar!"

"May I have a more direct reply? Can you give me your word of honour that he exists?"

"Well, well," stammered his lordship, "I don't know that quite—but——"

"That is enough," said the young dragoon, who shortly afterwards addressed a few pregnant words in another quarter.

"Lady Gwendoline!"

"What is it, Captain Lepel? You look haggard, upset!"

"Will you kindly tell me whether you are engaged to be married to Lord Aveling?"

"How tiresome you are! You are always talking of marriage, love, passion. You should write a sensational novel."

"That's all past history," said the young man, abruptly.

"I'm glad of that."

"And now will you kindly give me a plain answer to a plain question?"

"Well, I am engaged to him," said the lady, a little abruptly.

"Thank you."

"Why, what's the matter, Monty? Your looks quite frighten me. Stop, and let me explain."

"What very fine diamonds Mrs. de Costa has!" said the young dragoon, turning on his heel. "And what pretty flashes of ruby light shine out on her velvet!"

The gentle reader will now see the importance of the letter written by Mr. Huxtable.

Lord Aveling had practically admitted that there was no "Mr. Lepel."

The mock Mr. Lepel had withdrawn his allowance.

Gwendoline had confessed that she was engaged to be married to Lord Aveling.

This made concrete the vision conjured up by the Hindoo juggler. There was no Mr. Lepel. The mock Mr. Lepel was Lord Aveling, and Gwendoline, a cruel rival, had conjured him away. Fashionable life had been to him a mirage. It had lured him into extravagance and innumerable debts, and now it confronted him with—the little bottle of Peacock's Blood. The past, the present, and the future had been revealed to him by the Hindoo, according to promise.

That past seemed to pass before him in a rapid panorama, as it is said always to do in the presence of death. Summed up in a word, it was this huge defection of Lady Gwendoline.

As with one who has just fallen over a precipice and awakes half stunned and dazed,

the reasoning faculties of the young officer seemed unequal to their work. What was the meaning of the colossal puzzle? In his mind pictures the Lady Gwendoline had stood out from her surroundings unique and solitary. Amid the baboon world of Madame de Puffendorff, she alone seemed to possess a soul. He remembered her blush the day that she asked him to remain at Newton Priors. He remembered her exposition of her creed and her philosophy of life. That exposition was unconsciously modifying his own selfish materialism. He remembered how in spite of the palpable hostility of the deaf nobleman, her father, she had since treated him with friendship, and more than friendship. Why should the noblest of earth's daughters suddenly develop a treachery that would have put the meanest of them to the blush?

"I am the Lady Vivien of Lord George Ingilby!" These words suddenly came back to him.

He seized the little bottle of Peacock's Blood and raised it to his lips.

"Stop!" said a voice behind him.

He looked round and saw the Hindoo, Jeswunt Sirdar, gazing at him with an impassive countenance.

"What are you doing here?" he said, fiercely, springing forward.

"The pregnant question is, what are you doing here?" said the Hindoo, quietly.

"Are you not aware, sir, that the laws of polite society forbid a gentleman to invade another's bedroom in the middle of the night?"

"Are you not aware, sir, that 'Polite Society,' which is the Englishman's God, pronounces suicide a sin?"

"You have no right to pry into a stranger's affairs."

"No right and no necessity."

"What do you mean?"

"When a gentleman sits in front of a

bottle of poison, a photograph of a beautiful lady, and a letter announcing—what shall I say?—money difficulties, no very elaborate prying is required."

"What do you know about my money difficulties?" said Monty, speaking this time in a less haughty tone of voice.

"Have you not had evidence to-night that I know more about your affairs than you do yourself?"

"Do you?"

"You have put forward, young man, an ideal of happiness. I will not inquire whether it is a very lofty one; the waves of the British Channel, a somewhat narrow sea, make all pebbles and all young Englishmen one like the other. That ideal of happiness may be summed up in a word—a house in Grosvenor Square. That means luxury, elegance, consideration, fine company, hunting, racing, and as a corollary, in mathematical language, the love of a beautiful woman."

"My dear sir," said Monty, bitterly, "beautiful women are purchased, not with houses in Grosvenor Square, but with peerages."

"Just so, peerages."

"Go on."

"All these things you have set your heart upon."

"And even your magic cannot give them to me, can it?"

"No, for they are already yours."

"You speak in excessively difficult enigmas. That, I suppose, is a part of the conjurer's stock-in-trade."

"On your breast is a little jewel," said the Hindoo, calmly, advancing and placing a finger upon the young dragoon's shirt-stud. "That jewel is famous in India. It is called the Ahi Hirâ by the Hindoos. It is the famous Cobra Diamond!"

"What has this to do with the question?'

"Simply that that small stone can give you anything that your heart desires. You have but to hold it in your right hand and say: 'In the sacred name of Jagganâtha I desire such and such a thing!'"

"Jug of what? Juggernaut!" said Monty, with sarcasm. "Am I actually to invoke the gentleman whose car is more fatal than even the London butcher's cart?"

"The Cobra Diamond was once in the shrine of Jagganâtha, or as you prefer to call him, Juggernaut, in Pooree. Hence the invocation."

"And you would have me believe, that this little stone can give me everything I desire?"

"Everything!"

"That is accommodating. Can it give me a peerage, because short of that, nothing now will avail?"

"Even a peerage!" said the Hindoo, in a queer tone.

"My dear sir," said Monty, pursuing his sarcastic tone, "you are a very intelligent Asiatic. You know everything about the next world, and almost everything about this. But permit me to make a little correction. You have not quite mastered the intricacies of the English institution of peers. By birth and by beer can a young man alone enter its sacred portals. Forty years' subserviency to a political party may effect the same result, but that is a style of magic that is rather tardy."

"I know very little about English peerages," said the Indian, with a cold sarcasm that made the Englishman's efforts in that direction seem clumsy, "but this I know: you will to-night invoke Jagganâtha, and you will have your heart's desire."

As the Indian said these words, he touched Monty on the shoulder, which seemed to tingle and thrill. Soon a mist clouded his eyes, and he staggered and

reeled. When this mist cleared away, the Indian had departed.

An hour later, the young dragoon seized the Cobra Diamond in his hand, and called out: "In the name of Jagganâtha, I desire a peerage!"

Almost at the same instant, there was a hurried knock at his bedroom door. Monty was so startled that he could scarcely articulate the words, "Come in!"

It was the old butler, Robert Combe, and he announced that Lord Aveling had died suddenly.

CHAPTER VII.

A FLAGRANT INSULT.

THERE was an inquest held on the body of the late Lord Aveling, and it was stated at this inquest that the stomach and viscera of the late peer had been sent to the Government analyst for examination. At the inquest not much was elicited. Five days after this it was settled that the funeral was to take place. To his astonishment, Monty, who had gone back to Aldershot, was not invited.

"Perhaps Lady Gwendoline and the family want to intimate that our connection must now be emphatically severed."

Thus ran his thoughts as he drove along in a cab towards the railway station whence

start the trains for Newton Priors. The funeral was to take place at the little village church. Undertakers' men were on the platform, when Monty was looking for a carriage.

"Whose funeral is this?" he said, accosting one of them.

"Lord Aveling's, sir."

The young man was glad that he thus had an opportunity of companioning his best friend during his last railway trip. We all act as if the lost one was in the coffin.

Monty had purchased a few flowers as he drove through town. He placed these in a first-class carriage on the seat. Soon a servant in mourning brought a light mourning overcoat, a silver-mounted hand-bag, and a dandy little portmanteau, and placed them in the same carriage. The servant looked small, frail, subdued. He had on gigantic epaulets and aiguillettes of black worsted,

and they looked too large for him, or rather, he too small for them.

The servant's master now appeared. He was on a very large scale, heavy and coarse-featured. Master and man were mismatched. He had very broad shoulders and a very broad hat-band. He looked like a disconsolate widower, in the deepest mourning that money can buy.

"Damnation, Richard, why did you put my things in there?"

The large man gave quite an emphasis to the word "there"; he had looked in and scanned Monty a little contemptuously.

"Best carriage I could find, sir."

"I told you distinctly to put them in the Duke's carriage."

"It was locked up, sir, and the station-master said it was reserved."

"That's nonsense," said the large man, getting in not at all graciously. He altered the position of the wraps and the bag.

"Here, Richard," he said, suddenly addressing the small man with the large epaulets.

"Yes, sir."

"What's under that seat?"

"The small portmanteau, sir."

"D—n it, I don't want it in here. Take it out."

The large man then produced from his silver-mounted bag, which showed silver bottles as its mouth opened, a ponderous book and a paper-knife. He cut a few pages, and then said suddenly:

"This isn't a smoking carriage."

"No," said Monty, thinking that he had been addressed.

The large man looked up quickly, and presently said:

"I was speaking to my servant, sir." This was certainly rude. He cut a few more pages of his book, and then cried out: "Porter."

"Yes, sir."

"Send my servant here — that one in mourning."

"Yes, my lord."

"Where is the cross?" said the large man, when the servant arrived.

"In my carriage, sir."

"Bring it here. It will be safer."

Soon a very large band-box appeared, and was placed on the seat opposite to the large man.

"Here it is, sir."

"Open it," said the large man, "or the maiden-hair will shrivel."

The servant opened the band-box, and disclosed a very large mortuary cross of very expensive flowers. Presently the large man called out to him once again:

"Here, Richard."

"Yes, sir."

"Those d——d fellows are swilling beer. Send the undertaker."

Presently a man in weepers arrived.

"Look here, Mr.——"

"Moody!"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Moody. Please to get your men in some sort of order. They are smoking pipes and drinking beer all over the shop. This is not a greengrocer's funeral."

"Yes, sir, yes, sir—beg your pardon, sir," said the undertaker, obsequiously.

Monty thought there must be two funerals going off in the same train. He knew of no relation of Lord Aveling sufficiently close to be able to direct his funeral in this way.

The fidgety stranger had not yet done with his fidgets. By-and-by he pulled out a gold watch and looked at it. Once more he summoned a porter.

"Porter, send the station-master at once, please."

Soon that great functionary appeared.

"Station-master, really this will not do. Three minutes late already, on an occasion like this!" Here the large man flourished

his hand in the direction of the large funeral memorial. "There should be some punctuality."

"Yes, my lord. We'll be off at once."

The station-master knew that the body of a lord was in the train, so he thought that this large man must be the successor at least, the inheritor of the title.

As the train shot swiftly through meadow and copse, Monty was immensely puzzled. Was this large rude man some cousin, some blood relation of whom he had never heard?

"D—n it, open the door." This phrase was said very quickly and violently by the large man as the train was entering a station. Out he jumped, and presently returned with a handsome old lady richly dressed. "There is plenty of room in here, Lady Davenish," said the large man, quite obsequiously.

"I am afraid I intrude on your grief," said the lady, glancing into the carriage, and seeing the funeral cross and the two men

in deep mourning. As she spoke this she made a gracious little bow towards Monty as well.

"Not at all, not at all," said the large man, answering for both. The sympathy of a peeress is one of those things in which there is not enough for two.

"How kind of you! Yes—this little bag —I'll have it there."

All this time the large man was arranging the shawls and bags of Lady Davenish in the carriage, with much the same assiduity that the meek "Richard" had arranged his articles.

It seemed to Monty that there were two large men, a bully and a sycophant, both *en gros.*

Lady Davenish and the large man now discussed politics, and both seemed to be completely behind the scenes. Lord Davenish was a Cabinet Minister, but that fact seemed to have little effect on the large man. He

pooh-poohed this statement and that statement. By-and-by the lady got out of the carriage, helped—too much helped—by this coarse-looking, ill-favoured, stout gentleman.

Who could he be? This puzzled Monty immensely. He was plainly very intimate with great people. He seemed to know more about public affairs than Cabinet Ministers. He had flatly contradicted a peeress four times in a short railway journey. If he was the new Lord Aveling, where had he concealed himself all this time?

The train reached Newton Priors, and Monty went at once to the church. He had not been invited to the house. At any rate, in this manner he escaped Lord Grandison, and Lords Harold and James.

Soon the bell began to toll. Monty, without thinking, sat down in the pew where he and Lord Aveling had sat a few Sundays ago. Soon a coffin of scarlet velvet entered the church; it was smothered in flowers.

Lord Grandison and the Malapert party were behind. The large man was close to Lord Grandison.

There was a little delay at the entrance whilst the coffin was being placed on the trestles. Lord Grandison glanced in the direction of Monty. He and the large man exchanged words in whispers. Suddenly the large man walked up the aisle to the pew.

"This pew is reserved, sir, for the family," he said, in not very courteous tones.

Monty walked quietly out. He was furious.

"'Tis sad enough to stand by one's father's coffin. Why should they spit in my face?"

CHAPTER VIII.

FORTUNE'S BUFFETS AND REWARDS.

That night Monty put on his evening dress, and went to dine at the "Union Jack," his military club. Whilst his dinner was getting ready he shunned his friends in the "morning room" of the club, and went up into a large drawing-room.

A vast club begilt and bemarbled is the modern temple. The god of the nineteenth century, according to a French wit, resides in a holy of holies called the *bedaine*, and he receives very excellent meat and drink offerings.

The young man was confused—dazed with the great insult as with the blow of a bludgeon.

"After all," he said bitterly to himself, "the relations of the affectionate Lady Gwendoline are probably right. What right has a pauper to come to a fashionable funeral? I am a pauper. I am worse than a pauper, for a pauper has no debts, and he has a home, although not a luxurious one. Why did that meddling Asiatic intrude upon me when the bitterness of death was almost over? To-night I shall visit Waterloo Bridge, and go through it all again."

"Mr. John Huxtable wishes to see you, sir," said a page, suddenly. The voice made Monty start.

"Show him up."

In a minute or two, in walked Jack. He shook hands with Monty.

"I am in a hurry, old chap. My father sends you this."

Here the young artist produced a letter.

"Thanks, thanks," said Monty, putting it in his pocket.

"But, but—the governor wants an answer."

"All right, old chap, he shall have one. There's lots of time. Excuse me a moment, and I'll put your name down for what is called the club dinner. Nothing else can be prepared now."

"Excuse me, I can't stop." Jack, in point of fact, was in evening dress, and he was on his way to meet Miss Amy Greatorex.

"My dear fellow, you must, if you want an answer to that letter. All important business with me now means duns, disappointment, slaps in the face. It would be physically impossible for me to read that letter, until I am fortified with a big go of 'Dry Monopole' champagne."

"My dear Monty, I've got an appointment, or I'd stop—I would indeed."

"My dear Jack, do stop. You little know what queer things go on in this world. I didn't, a few days ago."

There was something in the manner of

the young dragoon, all through this interview, which specially attracted the attention of young Huxtable. In the end he determined to remain near him, and watch him, even at the sacrifice of his meeting with Amy. In a short time they went down to the dining-room.

After dinner, Monty announced his intention of going to "The Fortune." "The Fortune" was a little club famous for its high whist and high picquet.

"No, no," said Jack, "I certainly shan't go with you there." He had been watching his friend all through the dinner, and thought his manner excessively strange.

"I shall go."

"I wouldn't. A man ought to be cool at such places. Dry Monopole and rubicon picquet don't go well together."

"How you talk! With your luck, like old Beardie at Glamys, I'd play the devil all through the centuries."

"I have good luck — astounding luck sometimes. In life everything seems to go well with me. I was born, I suppose, with a silver spoon in my mouth."

"Then 'The Fortune' is plainly your haunt. Good luck seldom visits that establishment."

"No, no; I have quite given up cards. I turn the wheel of fortune in quite a different direction—my art."

"Try one of these Larrañagas," said Monty. They had adjourned to the smoking-room for coffee.

"Thanks. The fact is, Monty, you are not a painter, or you would know that art is a lottery fifty times more fetching than baccarat or picquet. I have been very lucky, but there are gray, sad men, with fifty times my genius, whose lives mean perpetual disappointment. I was at Featherley's, and twelve young fellows each sent up a drawing as good as mine for entrance into the school

of the Royal Academy. I alone succeeded. I sent a daub to the Dudley two years afterwards—a pot-boiler. It was hung, and I got fifteen pounds."

"Perhaps the little painting was good, Jack."

"It was execrable; so bad that the artist rather than his work should have been hung on the spot. I then tried the Royal Academy. Again I succeeded."

"That proves your talent, at any rate."

"Does it?" said the painter, with a little shrug. "Read the lives of Müller and David Cox, and more recently Burne-Jones and Herkomer. If that does not satisfy you, pay a shilling to-morrow and you will see some of the vilest work that a grateful country has ever received from its sons. Then in another lottery, a crucial lottery, I have drawn a great prize."

"Won, you mean, Jack, you're too modest."

"No, no, it's all luck. The difficulties to be surmounted were simply stupendous. Mr. Greatorex, although he has estimable qualities, is the most obstinate man that the world has yet discovered. He said, with some justice, perhaps: 'Marriage is a partnership, and my daughter brings seven hundred a year into the transaction. Her husband must produce an equivalent income.' This, to a struggling and suffering pot-boiler, was almost as good as saying: 'Unless you produce the blue riband of the Order of the Garter, or obtain the post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, you cannot marry Amy.' And when that old gentleman has once said a thing, I can tell you that he goes entirely on the principle that it is the most wise thing that has ever been said since Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. I was awfully cut up, for my case seemed hopeless. But the public began to buy my little efforts, and poor Aunt Dora, like an awful brick, left me

four thousand pounds. The impossible was realised. Luck again!"

"I'm off to 'The Fortune'; come along," said Monty, rising up when they had smoked their cheroots and drank their coffee.

"Don't go, my dear fellow."

"Do you know what I was thinking of when you came in?"

"No!"

"An excursion to Westminster Bridge this very night."

"What for, in Heaven's name?"

"To drown myself."

"Good God!"

When the two young men were hanging up their overcoats in the little hall of "The Fortune," a large man walked in.

"Who is that man?" said Monty, grasping suddenly Jack's arm.

"Don't you know? That is Scales."

"Scales!" said Monty, staggered.

"Yes, Scales. He is the editor of *The*

Privilege Review, and had once a post in the Ministry—Under-Secretary to the Reprimand Department. This he lost. Don't you remember his row with Professor Cactus, the eminent botanist?"

"Scales!" Monty repeated.

"He smiled upon the gentleman he was walking with. That proves it was a lord. In point of fact it was Lord Magnum. He comes into my studio sometimes without waiting for an invitation. When there, he talks about 'brio,' and criticises with much frankness, but he steadily ignores me outside the studio. To-day he comes to a hell with a marquis. Yesterday I saw him step into a Catholic church with a duke.

> I have been there and still would go,
> 'Tis like a little heaven below.

This isn't," pursued the artist, significantly.

Scales! Was this the "Mr. Carbuncle" of Lord George? Was this the father or uncle of the hateful sub-lieutenant who

had pursued Monty with such animosity? At once many an enigma seemed made plain. This was the meddling, untiring, unique man, who was ready to act as chief mourner at any lord's funeral at a moment's notice, or to arrange the love affairs of ladies of fashion.

The scene changes to two not very large and rather dingy apartments. Here the members of the "Fortune Club" meet every evening. The atmosphere is a little smoky. Gold jingles and corks pop, for play and aërated waters go well together. A crowd is round a little table where two players are playing rubicon picquet. These gentlemen seem chiefly anxious to bet with one alone of the players, and many get their wish gratified.

A stranger to the room is watching two modest players in a corner. But even these two players are chiefly interested in the other game.

"Lost again!"

"No, how very unlucky."

"Yes, but Colonel Prospectus is the best picquet player in the club."

"Still, such luck——"

"But also such play. Picquet is not 'beggar my neighbour.'"

The stranger watching these two modest players is Jack. He has come, we know, to look after Monty. But he has not the courage to watch the more popular game. For at that table Monty is losing very large sums. Twice he has tried hard to get him away.

"Quatorze again!" voices at the table are heard to say.

"Another game."

At last Jack forms a desperate resolution. He goes straight up to the table. It is difficult to pierce the crowd.

"Monty, come away."

"Impossible, my dear fellow!" The face

of the young dragoon is terribly haggard and pinched.

"You must, for I am going to cut in," said the painter, resolutely.

"You, a pattern young man!" said Monty.

"You drive me to it," said Jack, in a low tone.

When the betting gentlemen saw a fresh and frank-looking young stranger take up the cards against the best picquet player in London, they were still more anxious to press their bets.

"Five to two on the dealer."

"Two to one!"

Jack accepted the bets with the greatest freedom.

"Capote! What d——d luck!" said the betting men.

"Confound him!"

A short time afterwards, Jack and Monty were standing together.

"Now you'll come away," said Jack.

The answer of Monty was a curious one.

"In the name of Jagganâtha, I wish I had your luck to-night."

"Jagganâtha — Jug of punch! What jargon is this?"

"I don't know. I am desperate."

Soon two crowds were formed, one in the front room, and one in the back room, for two players were playing heavily. Monty was playing with Baron Von Gräbe in the back room, and Jack had been asked to give his revenge to Colonel Prospectus. In front of Monty, gold and bank-notes were accumulating rapidly. But this phenomenon was noticeable, if any of the onlookers had been cool enough to study his countenance: this unusual good luck seemed to make the face of the young dragoon more pale and haggard than the bad luck. By-and-by he seized his winnings, and left the club abruptly.

It is three o'clock in the morning, and a young man with a light overcoat and a Gibus hat is seen near Westminster Bridge. Shame, in her very tall hat and feathers, has looked in his face, and so has Social Order, with his bull's-eye; but neither can quite understand him. He passes along the sloppy pavements, which sparkle in the lamplight, and gets on to the bridge. The silent river is passing through the heart of the great city, and a cloudy moon is reflected on its waters. This ineffectual moon casts weak glints on the old Minster where England's great dead repose, and on the buildings where partisan recriminations are nicknamed politics. The millions of London are asleep. Its rich—the richest folks in the world—are enjoying their soft couches and their dyspepsia. Its poor—the poorest folks in the world—sleep in fever-dens, or on the cool but dangerous doorstep, with the risk of finding a police office at cock-crow. No sound breaks the

stillness but the rattle of the sleepless cab and the occasional distant scream of the locomotive.

Monty lights a cigarette, and gazes at the slowly-moving eddies. This process calms the heated young dragoon, but his thoughts soon run into a very dangerous channel. He begins to think of Lady Gwendoline. Every avenue of his thought is quickly closed up with her amazing beauties just now.

"Why did I come here?" Thus run his thoughts. "All through the evening I had determined to finish all things to-night at this bridge, as many sad folks have done before. How I got here the Psychical Research people alone can explain, for I rushed out blindly from the club. And now I am here, is there any cause or just impediment why I should not fulfil my resolution? The Gwendolines of the world don't marry natural sons, especially if they sell out of cavalry and wear bad hats. I won

money at cards to-night, it is true; but would Lady Gwendoline marry a card-sharper? Chance, all chance! It must have been all chance; and if I played heavily to-morrow, the committee of the club would probably have to remove my name from the club list, as a defaulter. Man is an ingenious bee; he comes into the world, and buzzes much, and toils a little. But the labour of drones and toilers has the same result—sulphur, smoke, and oblivion."

With a sudden resolution, the young man began to climb the balustrade. At this moment a poor creature, with a face raddled with paint and sin, asked him for a shilling to get something to eat. A shabby satin, bedraggled in the mud, glittered under the lamp. Monty dived into his pocket to give her a coin, and found the letter of Mr. Huxtable, that he had not had the courage to read. He broke the seal, and held it near a lamp. In a minute or two his

blood coursed through his veins in a wild tumult.

He pitched half-a-dozen coins to the poor woman, heedless of their colour or value.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORM TURNS.

I MUST ask the gentle reader to accompany me now to the residence of Mr. Huxtable. The Lilacs, Wandsworth, has already been pictured in the vision of Monty, and the picture was fairly accurate, for mind pictures are based for the most part on experience. The villa was of the suburban country villa type, with gables and Elizabethan windows. At the back a small studio had been hastily run up.

Let us enter. It is evident at once that Mr. John Huxtable, Artist, has an eye to colour. The wall is of a dull quadrate with a dado of Lincrusta work one shade darker. This serves as a background to feathers,

grasses, the skins of leopards and tigers, quaint carved oak furniture, Japanese vases, fans, and screens. Canvases are spread around. Some depict women, nude and unfashionable. Some portray women, semi-nude and fashionable. Here is a dark-haired lady, vague and with an *impressioniste* background. Here is another, a fair-haired lady, in a ball-dress. It is plainly an echo of Sir Rose Madder, the fashionable portrait-painter. It was exhibited, and critics spoke kindly of its "tender feeling" and "delicate scheme of colour." Jack has a facility—almost a fatal facility. His luck with dealers and purchasers is the envy of his fellow students. Unless the Fates have some sharp stroke in store, a terrible gulf is yawning before him. He may become a baronet, live in a marble palace, and paint aldermen's daughters *in sæcula sæculorum.*

In the middle of the studio is a large easel which works up and down with a

winch handle. On it is the picture of the lady whose chequered fate it was to love Oliver Goldsmith, and marry Squire Western. But it is to be doubted if the beautiful Mary Horneck had the flesh tints and healthy girlish beauty of the ideal "Jessamy Bride," that is her immortal name, painted by Jack. In her days lawn tennis and healthy out-of-door pursuits had not been invented. To get the fine flesh tints now on the canvas, an artist must have studied Maud Huxtable.

That lady is dressed up for the part, as she has promised Frank a long sitting this morning. Suddenly another girl bursts into the room.

"Why, it is you!"

"It is me, darling, with a vengeance. That is, I am bringing vengeance."

"To me?"

"To you!" said Miss Amy Greatorex, with a pretty scorn. "No; I am bringing

it to some one who deserves it. I have been most shamefully treated."

"By Jack?"

"By Jack, of course. Who else has the right and title to annoy and vex me? Positively, I did not sleep half an hour all night, and then I swore horribly in my dreams."

"What is it?"

"Well, well, I really am very, very angry. He was to have come to the Wedderburns, and I kept five dances for him. He never turned up."

"Depend upon it something detained him. He had, I know, to go and look after Monty Lepel, who is a little queer just now."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"His complaint is yours—love."

"I know nothing about love," said Miss Amy Greatorex. "Dear me, how tiresome you are with all this chatter! Positively you have never said one word about my

new dress. Contemplate it." As she uttered these words, the affianced bride of Mr. John Huxtable strutted about the studio with a pretty comedy manner.

"It is very, very pretty," said Maud.

"The colour is called 'putty colour' by the scientific. Trimmings of terra cotta silk, and terra cotta gloves. How do you like the ribbons of nabob gold in the hat?"

"Enchanting!"

"And now let us talk of something serious. You mentioned the word 'love.' Have nothing to say to it. There is a solemn undertaking called 'matrimonial business' into which I have embarked. It has nothing to do with love at all, any more than the purchase of cows and sheep. It has been impressed upon my youthful mind, from an early age, that this line of business is the true business of woman. My valuable experience I give gratis to you. Have nothing to do with love."

"For my part," said Maud, with a twinkle in her eye, "I don't want to have anything to do with marriage. Love is the inside of the orange, and marriage is the outside. Mashing is agreeable, both to the masher and the mashed. What more charming object in life than a young gentleman who is being mashed? You see the very best of him—company buttonhole and company behaviour. What more hateful object than the married masher—selfish and sulky?"

"Ah, but the one contains the other, as the velvety kitten contains the cruel Tom!"

"Yes, but I stick to the inside of the orange, and throw away the orange-peel."

"You'll trip on it some day, young woman, depend upon it."

"No, I won't."

"How nice the Jessamy Bride looks this morning!"

"No, she doesn't."

"She does, she does!" said Amy, dancing

round Maud, who now stood before the glass. "I envy you, awfully, your pink complexion and straight nose. Awfully, awfully!"

"What have such things to do with the purchase of husbands, and cows, and lambs?"

"Right, right! Every one admires nothing but my dresses, etc., in me. I can buy husbands, but I cannot win them."

"And I don't want them. Away, away!"

Each of these two young ladies affected the heartless chatter that is now so common. Maud had a rare beauty, but she railed at her adorers. Amy had the scepticism of the heiress—that painful initiation. There was a knock at the door. Each little thought that it was the harlequin stroke that was about to change life's frivolities into grim earnest.

"It is the delinquent," said Amy; "I must hide behind this screen. He must not see that I care for his treachery!"

A man entered. It was not Jack. It

was a greasy little Jew, with a sham cameo in his cravat.

"A picture, the Jessamy Bride, my dear," he said to Maud, taking her for an ordinary model.

"What do you mean, sir?" she said, indignantly.

"This is it, I see. I'm to carry this away."

"I am the sister of Mr. John Huxtable."

"Huxtable! That's it—the hartist."

"You cannot touch that."

"Can't I? Look 'ere!" At this point the greasy Jew produced a paper on which was written:

"Deliver to bearer the picture called the Jessamy Bride.

"J. HUXTABLE."

"What does this mean?" said Amy, who had left her hiding-place.

The greasy man whistled to a pal, and the two took up the picture in their arms.

"What does this mean?" said Maud, repeating Amy's question.

"It means, I guess, that distress is hartistical as well as agricultural. Landlords can't keep all good things to themselves."

The two girls looked at each other for some time in silence.

"What has happened?" said Amy, at length, with a white face.

"Nothing, I'm sure," said Maud, with looks that quite belied her words.

"I'm certain that something very dreadful has occurred," said the first speaker, and she burst suddenly into a flood of tears.

"My darling," said Maud, kissing her, "you must not talk like that. Artists send about pictures every day, to have their frames altered and so on."

"The man used the word 'distress,' and hinted that Jack is ruined."

"Yes, but he's only the servant of some picture-dealer. He may know nothing."

"Answer me this," said Amy, through her tears. "Where is your brother?"

"Well, I don't quite know."

"He was to have met me last night, and he broke his promise. With him, this means much. He was to paint you this morning, where is he?"

"I tell you that business may have detained him with Captain Lepel."

"I am quite certain," said the young girl, slowly, "that something quite dreadful has occurred. I felt it all last night, although I didn't tell anybody. I am subject to premonitions—silly fancies, papa calls them."

"He is right. We all of us have them, and they go quite wrong."

"Yes, but my silly fancies always come true."

At this moment a servant opened the door of the studio, and announced the Lady Gwendoline. Miss Greatorex immediately stuffed a handkerchief into her eyes to rub violently out all trace of tears.

A pale lady who drives up to a villa at Wandsworth in a carriage with a coronet on it, is an object of some terror to the ladies of the place. This was a little the view taken of Lady Gwendoline by Amy and Maud.

"I have taken the liberty to invade your house at a very early hour," she began, without looking round or seeming to notice anything in the studio.

"Not at all," said Maud, who quite hated herself for being detected in the dress of the "Jessamy Bride."

"Your sister asked me to come. You, I presume, are Miss Maud Huxtable?"

"Yes, I am the sister of Miss Huxtable," said Maud.

"You know, of course, that Lady Barwise is in a very weak state of health. Indeed, she has become so prostrate owing to the recent shock, that she cannot dispense with the services—the invaluable services—of your sister for a moment."

A word of explanation is here necessary. Millicent Huxtable had recently taken up with a form of curative mesmerism, called "Christian Science" for some reason or other by Lady Poyntz, who had taken it under the shadow of her wings. Millicent had proved a powerful sensitive, and had been induced by Lady Poyntz to try and relieve the insomnia of Lady Barwise. The result was, that that somewhat fanciful lady could not part with her a moment. Thus she found herself under the same roof as her cousin.

"And now to deliver your sister's message. She is anxious about your brother. Could I speak with you a minute in another room?"

"I am engaged to be married to Mr. John Huxtable," said Amy, suddenly. "I would be exceedingly obliged if any communication about him were made in this room."

"Oh, certainly."

Miss Amy Greatorex was an heiress, not quite guiltless of pretty pertnesses and gentle *concetti* in her own circle. But in the presence of Lady Gwendoline she had felt completely crushed. Not one glance had that great lady sent her way. But she felt sure that the "nabob gold," and her "putty colour," and her terra cotta gloves had all been weighed in the balance, and found wanting. The stately form and severe dress of Lady Gwendoline seemed to throw her, in artists' parlance, completely out of tone.

"It is perhaps a mere nothing," said that lady, in tones that were almost akin with gentleness.

"It is a mere nothing, for it is only a dream."

"Of course, dreams are nothing," said Amy, who didn't like Lady Gwendoline's commiseration.

"Miss Huxtable has had a dream, and nothing would satisfy her until I consented to drive over and thus take you all by storm."

"Not at all," said Maud.

"She dreamt that her brother and Captain Lepel went together to some gambling establishment, and there Mr. John Huxtable gambled away everything that he had got."

"That is funny," said Maud.

"Of course you must bear in mind that your sister has had much anxiety and many sleepless nights. Dreams come to the sickly."

"Oh, yes, it's only a dream," said Amy, abruptly.

"Captain Lepel," said the servant, opening the door.

In walked Monty. He looked pale, almost haggard, but there was a confidence, almost

a defiance, in his manner. He seized Maud by her two hands and gazed in her face.

"How ill you look!" she said.

"How well you look!" he answered.

"I am called the picture of health."

"In the name of Jagganâtha I wish I had your health." As he said this, he dived his right hand under his coat.

"You have not said 'How d'ye do!' to me, Captain Lepel," said Lady Gwendoline.

"I didn't see you," he replied. "So glad to welcome you to my ancestral domains."

"Ah, you used to live here!" said the lady, simply. "But I did not quite come to visit you. My visit is a little more prosaic. I came to talk over matters of business with Miss Maud Huxtable."

"How sad. You take away half the honour of the expedition."

There was a tone of hostility in his voice, restrained but deep, which Lady Gwendoline alone detected.

"Monty lived with us many years," said Maud.

"Then, naturally he loves this spot far more dearly than any spot in the world," said Lady Gwendoline.

"If I didn't I should be ungrateful," he said, simply.

"You would, indeed."

"Since I last saw you, Lady Gwendoline, and since I last saw you, Maud, I have been on the confines of the world of spirits."

"Oh, how ghastly!" said Gwendoline.

"Ghastly enough, I assure you," said Monty, quietly.

"How thankful your friends must be that you are still on this side of the gulf." This was the first departure of Gwendoline from the tone of commonplace talk. The sarcasm was so veiled that none detected it but Monty.

"I have duties now, Lady Gwendoline, which keep me on this side," said Monty.

"I am glad of that," said the young lady. She spoke this with a little less of self-sufficiency. Something in the last tones of Monty's speech had puzzled her.

"I must tell you that I have had a vision."

"More visions!" said Gwendoline, with a little laugh.

"You are responsible for this one, Lady Gwendoline. When the Thakoor of Bangle Pindy came to Grosvenor Square, if you will recollect, you insisted upon my being handed over to the tender mercies of the juggler, mesmerist, wizard, Jeswunt Sirdar!"

"Did I?"

"I got on the platform, and soon my senses seemed to fade away, and I was carried into a realm of nightmare—a very terrible region. It was called the Kingdom of Arrogance."

"I like that; a good title!" said Lady Gwendoline, with a little laugh. "It would make a splendid pantomime."

"It was very unlike a pantomime. To me, there was a terrible reality about it, for its denizens were known to me, though changed."

"Surely transformation scenes are not without example in pantomimes."

"They were Lord Harrys and Lady Marys, dukes and earls; and each had the head of some foul beast, rats, hyenas, jays, and swine."

"I said it was a pantomime," said Lady Gwendoline.

"There are two worlds—at least, so I was told by a genius that was by me—the animal world and the soul world."

"I don't want to belong to the animal world," said Lady Gwendoline.

"These all belonged to the animal world —the denizens of the Kingdom of Arrogance. They were very polite and well-bred on the surface; but they insulted their humble guests, they jilted their humble lovers; they

drove them into premature graves. You see, Lady Gwendoline, that it was very real."

"I don't believe in jilting," she said, simply. "And as for premature graves, let us hope that some lovers escape from them."

"But some do not. I said what you said to the genius, and she answered: 'By the blue sea in the South lies a grave, and in that grave is a man and an engagement ring. He could have made no mistake in the matter of jilting.'"

Lady Gwendoline looked at him steadily.

"I may be very dense, Captain Lepel," she said, with a little laugh. "I know that I ought to feel crushed; and yet I fail to see the extreme severity of the remark."

"Even at the grave of a man's father the Kingdom of Arrogance insults and outrages. Remember this is a vision, and I am not responsible for it."

"I am sorry," said Lady Gwendoline, "that you are so hard—I mean, of course,

that your vision is so hard—upon the denizens of the Kingdom of Arrogance; but I think you said that these jays and cockatoos were born in that objectionable kingdom."

"My vision so affirmed."

"Then how can the poor folks help the accident of their birth?"

This speech was said with much veiled impertinence, for Lady Gwendoline was very, very angry. To her astonishment the young man met her glance with a look of strange courage and strange defiance. It was a new sensation; for lovers are timorous.

"I may be very dense, Lady Gwendoline. I know that I ought to feel crushed, but I fail to see the extreme severity of that remark."

CHAPTER X.

MY LORD.

Monty has received, much to his astonishment, an invitation from Lady Barwise to dinner. A minute or two after he was shown up into the drawing-room, a bark was heard outside.

"Doggety, doggums, friendums."

Since Lady Barwise had been made acquainted with the past of the Beau, she had become more extravagant in her fondness. In another minute she came into the drawing-room on the arm of Millicent.

"Captain Lepel, you have quite deserted us. My dear, should I be asking too much if I wanted that cushion? Yes, that one, over there."

"I didn't quite like to intrude upon you, Lady Barwise."

"Intrude! Oh, no! You were one of poor Percy's best friends. He liked you so much. Ah! 'in the midst of life we are in death,' as the Bishop truly says. What o'clock is it, my dear?"

"A quarter to seven."

"He ought to be here. He is usually punctual. Few can know what a support he has been to me in my affliction. My darling, darling." This to the dog.

"The Bishop of Dorminster is a very kind man," said Monty.

"A man in a thousand. Why they want to disestablish the Church I cannot comprehend. What should we be without the consolations of religion? That sounds like a carriage. Captain Lepel, you must be hungry, and Gwendoline, too."

"Well, I can't quite—say——"

"Excuse me, Captain Lepel, for inter-

rupting you, but isn't that *The Nineteenth Century* on that table?"

"It is."

"Perhaps it would be better to put it out of sight. The controversy between Professor Quartz and the Duke of Gurgoyle, on geology, though most interesting, is not quite orthodox."

In the days of old, bishops screened "dangerous" books from babes and sucklings; now babes and sucklings screen "dangerous" books from bishops.

The Bishop of Dorminster was a prelate who was very popular with ladies. He had a good figure and a fine voice, although certain apostolic tones that he affected gave a little artificiality to what he said. He had once been the tutor of Lord Barwise; and it was in a measure due to Lord Grandison's exertions that Lord Graves, when Prime Minister, offered him the See of Dorminster. There, but for a sharp en-

counter with a heretic in the Court of Arches, which cost him £8,000, the Bishop may be said to have lived a comfortable life for many years. Recently he had become a martyr to gout. The worthy Bishop had only three enemies in the world — the Liberation Society, sugar in wine and cookery, and theology.

"So glad to see you, Bishop," said Lady Barwise, the logic of whose nature forced her to ramble even in her grief. "In the midst of life we are in death."

"That great truth is being constantly brought home to us," said the Bishop, with some fervour.

"I have been reading the 'Dream of St. Gerontius,' by Cardinal Newman. Lady Oriel says it's a second Bible, and I think she's right."

"The poem is a beautiful one," said the Bishop.

"It tells us all about the next world, and in times like this is very consoling."

"My good friend, you need consolation," said the Bishop, who liked Lady Barwise very much.

"But there are some things that I can't quite make out.

> Nor touch, nor taste, nor hearing hast thou now,
> Nor power to move thyself, nor limbs to move.

The guardian angel of St. Gerontius tells him all this. He is without a body apparently until the resurrection."

"That apparently is the teaching of the poem," said the Bishop.

"Then how does he hear the lectures, the beautiful lectures of his guardian angel, and the beautiful hymns of the souls in purgatory?"

"Ah, these are mysteries," said the Bishop, who, truth to tell, was not very enthusiastic about such inquiry.

"And if there has been no judgment, how have these souls been condemned to purgatory? Ah, here comes Combe. You must all be hungry. Doggety, doggums, you must go down with dear Aunt Millicent. Captain Lepel, will you take in Gwendoline?"

That lady, looking very handsome, had just sailed into the room.

"My belief," said Lady Barwise to the Bishop on the stairs, "is that gout is the real purgatory."

"I believe you are right, dear friend," said the Bishop, with a smile.

"No cross, no crown," said Lady Barwise; "but I have got some potash and Irish whisky that Sir William Grimsby says is quite the elixir of life."

"Is Lord Aveling in a better humour to-night?" said Lady Gwendoline.

"Gwendoline, you know——"

"Nothing—and everything."

"Hush!"

This remark, uttered in a whisper on the stairs, astonished Monty; but before the evening was over something occurred which astonished him still more.

CHAPTER XI.

TRANSFORMATION.

"And now that they have gone," said Gwendoline, "tell me your story."

Monty was left alone with this lady when the Bishop had departed, and Lady Barwise, a little weary, had gone off to bed. The Lady Gwendoline had thrown herself down on a sofa; but her careless attitude, in the view of Monty, was a very graceful one.

"There isn't much to tell. At least, I don't know very much. In early days Lord Aveling, then Percy Newton, about the time that he received his troop, was quartered at Brighton. One day as he was sauntering along near the sea in his stable jacket, a lady came along the road driving a fine

pair of bays. Whether it was his sabre-tasche or what it was, something frightened the horses, and they began to kick and plunge about in a most violent way. The lady was without a groom. Lord Aveling feared a disaster. He hastened up and contrived to control them, but not without considerable difficulty. The lady was loud in his praises. She was very beautiful—reddish hair, a full figure."

"Half tigress, half Titian's Venus; I know the kind of creature."

"Lord Aveling was immensely struck with her; in fact, he fell in love at first sight. He asked if he might call. The lady said she would be quite delighted, and gave him her card: 'Mrs. Noel Manners; 8, Oriental Place.' He called, and soon grew more infatuated than ever. Mrs. Noel Manners was a widow living in a certain luxury, but she seemed to know no one at Brighton. She explained that society there was so mixed

that she was obliged to be careful. The father of Lord Aveling was an old Peninsular dragoon, haughty, abrupt, domineering."

"I know all about him," said Gwendoline. She was immensely interested in the story.

"Three years before, the son had fallen in love with a young lady living near Newton Priors. The father, when he heard of it, broke off the engagement and turned his son out of his house. For years he allowed him only a pittance. But this violent conduct roused the independence of the young man. He determined on the next occasion to marry without consulting his father. He proposed to Mrs. Noel Manners, but told her that the marriage must be kept a profound secret until the death of his father. She accepted him, and on her side made a similar reservation."

"That was very suspicious," said Gwendoline, musing.

"They were married privately, and the end may be guessed. He found compromising letters. There had been a Mr. Noel Manners, but there was no evidence of any marriage. Lord Aveling made the very best allowance he could to his wife, and left her for ever. Two years afterwards, when travelling in Italy, he got a fever at Leghorn. In the same hotel was an English family, to whose attention his safety must be ascribed. To one of these, Miss Dora Huxtable, he became much attached. And he cursed his fate at being saddled with a hateful creature with tously red hair."

"Go on."

"Suddenly there was light on the dark picture. A letter arrived from the Rector of Ledgard Fleury, in Somersetshire, announcing that the Hon. Mrs. Percy Newton had just died in his parish. On her deathbed she had expressed contrition, and begged him to write a letter stating this fact. The

letter was signed James Rivington Bulpitt. On searching the clergy list, it was found that there was such a divine. Lord Aveling at once proposed to, and was secretly married to Miss Dora Huxtable. He was still afraid of the anger of his father."

"What a strange story!"

"Yes, but you must hear the end of it. Mrs. Noel Manners was not dead. The whole business turned out a plant. One day, when the bride and bridegroom were enjoying themselves in a retired little watering-place in Argyllshire, a lady with red hair suddenly appeared before them. Lord Aveling viewed her with absolute consternation. He had by-and-by to explain to his new wife the cause of this agitation, and an immediate separation was the result. An interview that he had with the Venus of Titian was hardly less trying. When he showed her the letter that he had received from the Rev. James Rivington Bulpitt, she boldly pro-

nounced it a forgery, executed by him, and refused to return it. This placed him in a very painful position. It was a big scheme of *chantage* and extortion, and behind it was Mr. Noel Manners *alias* Tom Cherry."

"But the Titian's Venus can be no longer alive——"

"No, of course not, or you would never have been engaged to him. On her death-bed she confessed that she was married to Tom Cherry, and in consequence never married to Lord Aveling at all."

"You must get evidence of that."

"Yes, that is my task on earth, to clear my mother's reputation. What I have told you must be kept secret for the present."

"Just so. And now, my lord, I wish you good night." As she said this, she came up close to him and gave him a mocking but very graceful curtsy.

He seized her in his arms.

CHAPTER XII.

J. T. DITMAS.

The next morning Monty took breakfast at the "Union Jack." He sat next to a brother dragoon, Flint of the Carabineers.

"By Jove, Monty, how well you are looking! I scarcely knew you."

"'Mens sana in corpore sano.' Observe the consequences of a virtuous life and reform."

"Virtuous! Is that the word? By-the-bye, Monty, what are all these hints in the society papers about the famous detective, J. T. Ditmas, being in the house of your old C. O., Lord Aveling?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Monty, getting up. He hurried away to St. James's

Park. He was glad to escape the cackle of the club. Soon he reached the sheet of water, and sat down on a chair. The large plane-trees were a mass of leaves, and their delicate greens were repeated in the still pool. Between their branches the solemn towers of the Abbey peered.

Dreamland is a very lawless region. In it we forget all about the matchless English code as expounded by Littleton and the shrewd Sir Edward Coke. We kiss people who have been long ago cut off from our kisses by the rigid English marriage laws. We push our rivals over precipices, and think these acts moral as well as lawful—that is, if we think at all.

Is Monty in lawless dreamland this morning? A few days back, in a very palpable England, he nourished a very high idea of Lady Gwendoline. Lofty and pure, she stood out from the Lady Marys and Lady Florences, her peers, like, let us say, a Fra

Angelico in a French *salon*. She represented the Impossible. In a world ruled by Lord Grandisons, a penniless soldier could not hope for a terrestrial marriage; but he was loved, and there are celestial marriages that no Lord Grandison can disturb.

But to-day all is changed. The Lady Gwendoline has come down from her "impossible" pedestal; but is it the Lady Gwendoline of the young man's visions? Instead of being above the small lures that tempt the ordinary Lady Marys and Lady Florences, had she not engaged herself to Old Age when Old Age meant diamonds, carriages, country houses? She had jilted a poor lover, and sneered at his low birth; and a few hours afterwards had kissed this lover when the pauper was changed into a peer. And yet the young man is more wild with love than he has ever been before, and his mind picture of the Lady Gwendoline, as viewed from the outside, more entrancing. He can

think of nothing else, and has determined to call at an early hour and make her his. Small questions of morals he puts aside like a man in a dream.

There is a pastime more practised by ladies than men. This is to build up a bright home in the cloudland, and to furnish and decorate it with the objects noticed in a walk through a great city. That claret-coloured landau would do for me, and those footmen, sedate but well matched and large. In this jeweller's shop I see many trinkets that I must have, and in that are the right knick-knacks for boudoir and bedroom. That large picture of an orange harvest shining out against a strong screen of stately dark elms would do for the dining-room. Some such fancy to-day is in the mind of Monty, as he passes the shops and equipages in his walk. He lolls into a tailor's shop in St. James's Street, and orders some more clothes; also he pays a long-standing bill. He

examines some saddlery in another shop. A poor woman with a placard inscribed "Blind" is leaning against the rails of the Green Park. In sunshine, in rain, she stands there; in frost and in snow. Monty puts half-a-crown into her little tin box, and it rattles pleasantly. He then looks at some gentlemen's studs, and pins, and sleeve-links, as well as some ladies' rings. He selects a set of mourning studs, and also an engagement ring with one large diamond and two sapphires.

Twelve o'clock is now sounding out, and Monty is in Grosvenor Square.

As he reached the door a stranger arrived from the opposite direction. He was a square-shouldered man, with a heavy neck and jowl. He wore dark gray trousers and a frock coat, ill-fitting, but respectable. His face was clean shaved. It flashed across Monty that this must be J. T. Ditmas.

"Are you the police officer that is constantly on duty at this house?"

"Well, sir, I'm a police officer," said the man addressed, a little cautiously.

"Mr. J. T. Ditmas?" said Monty, recollecting.

"Well, sir, J. T. Ditmas is my name."

"What's up, inspector?"

"Nothing that I know of, sir."

"But I suppose you suspect somebody of some crime?"

"No, sir, we never suspects anybody. I have no half-way house between inquiry and conviction."

"Inquiry! I wonder if you could help me?"

"Help you, sir?"

"Out of a puzzle."

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"Lepel."

"Captain Montague Lepel!" said Mr. Ditmas, who had suddenly become attentive.

"Yes, that's my name. Can you step round the square a moment or two?"

"I can, sir."

"Well, I want you to tell me whether you can help me to find out something about a man."

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, very wrong conceptions are abroad about detectives. The lady in the novel always engages a detective. In reality the detective is an official obeying the orders of his superiors, and with less spare time on his hands than almost anybody in the world."

"But you may give advice, and put me in the right track."

"What is it, sir?"

"Did you ever hear of a Mr. Tom Cherry?"

"Tom Cherry—racing man—horse dealer? I certainly have."

"What sort of man is he?"

"A bad hat."

"Well, the point I am working up to is this: Mr. Tom Cherry at one period of his life married a person who afterwards figured as Mrs. Noel Manners."

"He married her?"

"Yes; he married her. I am certain of that, but I want my certainty made patent in the light of day. I want a copy of the marriage register."

"That ought not to be impossible," said the detective.

"I am willing to pay for the search. Money will not stand in the way of it."

"Then you are interested in this matter, sir?"

"Well—yes——"

"I don't ask for any confidence, sir; but you see at present an investigator would have very little information to work on."

"Well, the fact is, Inspector, the late Lord Aveling married this Mrs. Noel Manners; but I now know that this marriage was no marriage at all."

"You know that," said the detective, in a queer voice.

"Positively."

"All this is very important, sir. I will see what can be done."

Monty rushed into the house. He learnt that Lady Gwendoline was in the drawing-room. How fortunate! He sprang up the stairs three at a time. What was his annoyance to find the lady in close confab with a man wearing a large white waistcoat; a man wearing a large pair of tender gray trousers; a man with a large nose and large mouth; in fact, with Mr. Scales.

"Don't you know Mr. Scales?" said Lady Gwendoline.

"I have not that pleasure," he answered. And the two men bowed a little like two French journalists about to push at and prod each other with sharp rapiers.

Mr. Scales had a special talent; this was to keep a third person completely out of the conversation when he felt so inclined. Apparently he did feel this special inclination upon this particular morning. He

talked house affairs, and explained very learnedly what ought to be done with the cistern which had gone wrong, and where the best peaches were to be had, and what was to be done about the lameness of one of the carriage horses. He talked of Lady Fanny's asthma and Lady Mary's engagement. Lady Gwendoline, who could convey her thoughts with knitting needles, or by the aid of church embroidery, seconded Mr. Scales very effectually in this pastime. Both completely ignored Monty.

The young dragoon was frantic. First he thought he would sit out the great Scales, and have an explanation. Then he thought he would run away. As he jumped up there was a barking outside. The door opened, and in rushed the Beau, who continued his noise as Lady Barwise came in.

When a prize is given by a society paper to the person who shall name the most aristocratic being in London, there will be

two conspicuous candidates voted for. The great Mr. Scales will poll many votes, but the prize will go to the Beau. He barked more furiously at rags and humility than the editor of *The Privilege Review*. As Lady Barwise was soon in the middle of an animated conversation with Mr. Scales about the cistern, Monty got, at length, an opportunity of speaking a word to Lady Gwendoline.

"You don't seem very eager to see me to-day."

"Very eager. What do you mean by 'very eager'?" said the lady, who was prodding very leisurely at a stocking for some of Lady Barwise's poor.

"Tell me; have you changed your mind in the night?"

"Changed my mind! About what?"

"Oh, nothing," said Monty, angrily. "I had brought you a ring—see here!" He showed the ring for a minute, and then clapped it in his pocket.

Ardent youth is apt to jump to hasty conclusions; but when such an ardent youth kisses an unmarried lady in Grosvenor Square, and the next morning purchases an engagement ring, it is to be presumed that there was something in the manner of the lady that gave a certain encouragement.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TELEGRAM FOR LORD AVELING.

MONTY dined at his club. He sat next to his friend, young Flint of the Carabineers.

"How silent you are, old chap. One would think that you had been cwossed in love." Mr. Flint spoke the language of the heavy dragoon.

"And you, my dear Flint, with that stephanotis in your button-hole, look perfectly joyous. Are you going to a wedding or a ball; or a ball followed by a wedding?"

"Neithaw, old fella; but I like to set an example to the lower bwanches of the service—engineaws, infantwy, adjutant-genewals, fellaws who don't dwess for dinner."

"That's kind."

"Good Gad, what stuff you are dwinking! No wonder you have acidity and nerves. The only wine fit to dwink in this club is Dwy Nonpaweil, laid down in 1870."

Mr. Flint was a gentleman who ate stick-jaw with avidity three years ago at school; now nothing contents him except Nonpareil champagne, and cigars that cost eighteen-pence apiece.

"Goodness gracious!" said Monty, "I wish I had consulted you before I ordered my dinner."

"Where are you going to-night?"

"To the devil, or to bed."

"Come to the opewa and see the new singer, Valda, in *Faust*."

"I haven't got a stephanotis, nor a crutch, nor an opera hat."

"Come, at any rate, to the smoking-room. I can't say a word more without my coffee and kummel."

"Come along," said Monty, walking away to the cashier's desk to pay his bill.

"By-the-bye," said Second Lieutenant Flint a few minutes afterwards, "have you seen the *Pall Mall*?"

"No!"

"Well, the police have got a clue; that's the last thing."

"A clue! A clue to what?"

"To the man who murdered your old C. O., of course."

"Murdered—who says he was murdered?"

"Well, well, he eithaw was murdered, they say, or died of a stwange malady. Something between 'symbolism' and an 'emblem.'"

"Embolism."

"That's it. How clever you are!"

The attenuated columns of Covent Garden Opera House are resplendent with golden glitter, and a soft sheen is on the abundant canary satin of the drop-scene and the box decorations. All London has assembled

to witness the first appearance of Valda; and pretty opera cloaks and gay dresses give plenty of colour. Mr. Flint, with an opera hat and an accurate crutch, assists his aged frame into a stall. Monty follows. He sees many old acquaintances in the house, but he reflects that no one knows that he ought to be in deep mourning, and that he is in any way related to Lord Aveling.

"Ain't you glad you've come?" said young Flint, who was surveying the house with binoculars as big as himself.

"Well, I wanted excitement to-night," said Monty.

"Well, Valda will give you that. There's Lindsell of the Bays, and old Jack Foote, and Kate Vandeleur, looking prettier than ever, and Lord Dalgleish."

"Is Valda Spanish or Italian?"

"'Marican, I calculate. There's Thoyts, parson and critic; he says Valda's voice is of very rare timbre. How do, Prospectus?"

At this moment Monty, who was looking round the house, was conscious that a pair of eyes was being steadily fixed on him. The gazer was a commonplace-looking individual, with a shiny bald head and a paunch. He had a shoddy look about him—vulgarity mixed with pretension. But his eyes seemed to have a strange magnetic power; they fidgeted Monty. Suddenly it seemed as if the stranger observed that he was the object of Monty's gaze, for he at once shrouded those keen eyes with a large pair of binoculars.

All this time the house was filling. Soon a large man appeared, squeezing through the stalls, with a very large Gibus in his hand. He acknowledged the greeting of little Flint not very graciously, and paid no attention at all to a greeting of Monty, though at the moment he was squeezing that officer almost into a pancake. The large man was Mr. Scales. Other people that evening had been

curt and cavalier. It was generally believed that Monty was ruined.

All this threw the young man into a fit of depression, and this was intensified by his recent treatment at the hands of Lady Gwendoline.

"What a strange thing is life!" Thus ran his thoughts. "This morning I thought that chance or the devil had given me all that I could conceive of joy and comfort. Instead of a wasting melancholy, I had ebullient health. Instead of the impertinence of Scales, I had a peerage. Instead of duns, I had bank-notes. Instead of the artistic and unsleeping rebuffs of the most beautiful woman in Europe, I had kisses. For three or four brief hours I knew what human joy is. Until this moment, I confess I did not know real sorrow.

"Of what stuff is this Lady Gwendoline? Of what fibre is this unexampled enigma? Does it mean that the London of the cynics

is the true one — a slave market, where charms and caresses have their fancy price? Is the love of Gwendoline hedged in by the prudences of a business transaction? Had she drawn back that she might see the title-deeds before she bartered affection for a peerage?"

This cynicism was intensified by the weird music that was now stealing unconsciously on the young man's senses. Soon his attention began to fix itself upon the opera. And soon strange points of analogy presented themselves between himself and its hero.

Faust was a being infected with that huge melancholy which comes at times to every thoughtful son of Adam. It has been called the "divine discontent." He was cognisant in his dreams of a life of sympathy, and happiness, and love. He was cognisant in his waking moments of a life that differed radically from this. Insuperable obstacles rendered the first life impossible, as they did to Monty recently, for the love

even of a Marguerite must be bought with jewels and glitter. Suddenly Mephistopheles comes upon the scene, and offers to the dreamer the fondest dreams of his heart. Monty shuddered at this stage of the drama. He, too, loved Marguerite. He, too, had uttered unhallowed incantations to secure her kiss. With Faust, that kiss was dearly bought. Did it not set in motion at once the springs of a colossal drama in which Marguerite's brother, Marguerite's baby, and Marguerite herself were to shed their blood? And had not Monty purchased the kiss of Lady Gwendoline at a dear price? His father was dead; his friend Jack was dead also, most probably; Maud was on a bed of sickness, he had just heard. It might be superstitious folly to imagine that these three tangible facts had anything really to do with the Cobra Diamond. But the young man felt somehow that he, too, was in the middle of a colossal drama that,

"shod with silence," was marching on to an unknown catastrophe.

But the drama of *Faust*, as interpreted by Mons. Gounod, has much sweet as well as much weird music.

By-and-by the sweet songs of Valda had the effect of making Monty less morose. He reflected that Gwendoline was a very, very proud woman. Of course, to such a lady it must be a considerable effort to pass from scorn to love. She might kiss a lover in a moment of weakness, and bitterly repent it on the morrow. The young man reflected also that this beautiful woman had a short time before been engaged to be married to his father. At this moment, looking round, he once more detected the gaze of the stranger with the eyes. Again those eyes were fixed upon him; again they seemed to look him through and through; and once more the stranger, on finding his gaze detected, put up a pair of opera glasses.

At his club that night, Monty found a note from Millicent.

"DEAR MONTY,

"Lady Barwise hopes you'll come over to-morrow at eleven. Lord Aveling's will is to be read. She says that it would be so nice to have all his old friends present.

"Yours sincerely,

"M. HUXTABLE."

Monty came in a little late. There was a formidable gathering; Lord Grandison, Lord Harold Malapert, and Lord James amongst the rest. They merely gave him each a small nod. The Master of the Ceremonies seemed to be the ubiquitous Scales. As this gentleman has hitherto been depicted as he figured in the mind—the not very unprejudiced mind of Monty—a few remarks are necessary.

Round the great there accumulate ama-

teur aide-de-camps, amateur equerries, the Wilson Crokers and Theodore Hooks. These men, like German waiters in suburban hotels, serve for nothing and are thankful for the office. But Mr. Scales and Lord Grandison had long been mixed up politically. *The Privilege Review*, if a little out of date, had much influence in certain political circles. Thus Mr. Scales, who owed his seat in Parliament and place in the Ministry to Lord Grandison, was able to help his lordship in return. He inserted that nobleman's attacks on rival statesmen, and helped him with his own pen. The articles of Mr. Scales were dull and pompous, but the readers of *The Privilege Review* loved dull and pompous articles—they are so respectable. Also they showed a great knowledge of what was going on, and considerable shrewdness here and there. Thus Mr. Scales was quite as necessary to Lord Grandison as Lord Grandison was to the happiness of Mr. Scales. And when an alli-

ance like this between a great man and a small man springs up, it is difficult to define its nature and extent. Mr. Scales was useful to Lord Grandison; also he was most useful to Lady Grandison, and would have been called that lady's "zebra" if he had lived in France. A zebra is a pure and immaculate *cavaliere servente.*

And now an unfortunate scene took place. It is the peculiarity of the deaf to think that the sense of hearing is confined to themselves. In consequence they often whisper secrets in a tone of voice that could be heard by a neighbouring ship. By-and-by this conversation passed between Lord Grandison and Mr. Scales:

"Here, Scales!"

"What is it, my lord?"

"That man that you pointed out to me at the funeral. He's here again. Captain What's-his-name."

"So he is, my lord."

"Do you mean to tell me that he still aspires to the hand of Lady Gwendoline?"

"My lord, I saw him offer a diamond ring to her yesterday."

"Impossible!"

"I saw it with these eyes."

"Turn him out of the house," said his lordship, abruptly.

This conversation, which was heard by Monty, will account for the strange scene that followed. Mr. Scales, with that large pomposity which eminently became him, marched across the room to Monty, and, in tones that were a little too sonorous, said in the hearing of all:

"Mr. — ah — eh! I'm asked by Lord Grandison to hint to you that this meeting is restricted to members of Lord Aveling's family."

Monty looked up proudly:

"Since you have taken upon yourself, sir, the office of amateur footman, please

to walk back across the room and say to Lord Grandison that I belong to Lord Aveling's family."

Mr. Scales, in some bewilderment, did as he was told. Meanwhile Monty placed his right hand under his waistcoat, and muttered these words to himself:

"In the name of Jagganâtha, I require evidence to confound Scales."

"Lord Grandison," said Mr. Scales a moment afterwards, "says that the meeting is restricted to the regular members of the family."

"What do you mean by regular members of the family?" said Monty, quietly.

"Those of the legitimate branch," said Mr. Scales.

Here a servant entered hastily.

"A telegram for Lord Aveling."

"Give it me, Frederick," said Monty, quietly.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Scales,

coming forward pompously, "Lord Grandison has asked me to look over all such documents."

But before this great person was able to reach this telegram, and intercept it, Monty had taken and quietly torn it open.

"Excuse me, Mr. Scales, in my own house I always open my own letters."

CHAPTER XIV.

GRADATIONS IN "DIGNITIES."

THE next day Monty had to return to Aldershot. He wanted to apply for some leave on urgent private affairs — thus runs the military terminology. The discovery of the detective's rendered this necessary. This was the telegram that he had received the previous evening:

"DITMAS
to
LEPEL, Union Jack Club, London.

"Pals discovered marriage—Tom Cherry, Jane Hicks—Ventnor, June 19th, 1851."

On reading this, Monty argued in his mind that Jane Hicks and Mrs. Noel Manners were one and the same person, otherwise the

shrewd Mr. Ditmas would not have sent the telegram. Spurred on by the impertinence of Mr. Scales, he had in consequence boldly announced that he was a peer. When he returned from Aldershot, he found quite a pack of cards waiting for him. The news of his good fortune had spread like wild-fire. With a satisfaction that had something of the grim in it, he noticed amongst these cards those of Colonel Prospectus and Lords Harold and James, with other personages who had worn the heads of animals in his vision.

"I am admitted to the menagerie of the happy family," he muttered.

At dinner many men came to his table, and offered their congratulations. Some excellent champagne had warmed up his brain, and he felt in capital spirits. And, whether or not it was due to weird arts, he felt in amazing health and strength.

The next morning a letter was handed to him. It was from Grosvenor Square.

"DEAR LORD AVELING,

"Are you still in the sulks? I do not ask this somewhat impertinent question; it is Lady Barwise who wants to know, and wants you to come and bring an answer at eleven to-morrow.

"Yours faithfully,

"GWENDOLINE."

What was the meaning of this? Was Lady Gwendoline like Colonel Prospectus? Was she going to smile now that he had really become a lord? At the appointed time our hero went to Grosvenor Square. Soon there was a barking outside the drawing-room, which meant an advent of Lady Barwise, and so did certain sounds outside as the door flew open.

"Unclums cummums. Doggety, doggums. Tailum waggums. Gladdums, doggums."

"How d'ye do, aunt?" said the young man a moment afterwards.

Lady Gwendoline came in with Lady Barwise.

"That's it, that's it; thank you. Would you place the chair a leetle nearer the window? That's it; thank you. Why, it's Monty! So he's actually my nephew!"

"And nephews kiss their aunts," said Monty, saluting Lady Barwise.

"So they do—their old aunts," said the good lady, retaining her nephew's hand, and pressing it. "The dear Beau is glad. Unclums, bunclums, gladdums, kissums. Perhaps some one would kindly give me that green worked stool with the pale green floss silk."

Monty sprang forward, but Gwendoline had anticipated him. On this green stool their hands met.

"How well you're looking, aunt, to-day!"

"Well, well! Neuralgia is a wearing thing; but I am, for me, well. And now tell me about this Mrs. Noel Manners. Fancy

discovering a nephew in *The Morning Post*! Why didn't you tell me before?"

"As long as there was uncertainty, I did not like to announce hopes that might be doomed to disappointment——"

"Amongst friends I don't see that that holds good."

"Pardon me, aunt, I have had excellent instructors who have made it often plain to me that the difference between a peer and a nobody can scarcely be stated in words."

Lady Gwendoline took this little gird with becoming calmness. She leisurely smoothed the pillow of Lady Barwise.

"Who could have put such ideas in your head? I'm sure that from your old aunt and from Gwendoline you have received nothing but kindness."

"Oh, present company is always excepted, aunt. But two nights ago I was cut by five fashionable people that I knew fairly well; and yesterday all these people called

upon me to congratulate me on having joined their set."

"Set, set! What set?"

"My cousin Monty has had a dream," said Gwendoline, chiming in demurely.

"A dream, a dream! Tell me all about it."

"Captain Lepel dreamt that he saw all his acquaintances — I beg pardon, *our* acquaintances — with heads of rats, dodos, geese——"

"Why our acquaintances?" said Lady Barwise.

"He explained that this was because we live in an animal world," said Lady Gwendoline, with sedate comedy.

"Excuse me, aunt, I merely described what I saw; I gave no explanation."

"I was a beautiful cockatoo. My plumage was lovely, but my screech, to all except an harmonious spirit, a little shrill."

"If I recollect my vision aright, aunty, it was addressed not to the 'classes,' as

they are now called, but the 'masses.' I was of the masses."

At this moment the Bishop of Dorminster was announced.

"Ah, Bishop, I'm so glad you've come. This gentleman and this lady are talking politics, and quarrelling dreadfully."

"Politics?" said the Bishop.

"My lord," said Monty, "it is the opinion of Lady Gwendoline that modern society in London is an association of angels—meek, fraternal, democratic angels—who have abolished the distinctions of archangels, thrones, dominations——"

"On the contrary," said Gwendoline, "it is my opponent who holds that dukes should help the unemployed to battle with the police, and that a lady of rank should try and find an affinity in a sandwich-man carrying a board inscribed 'Don't look at my back.'"

Gwendoline and Monty are decidedly both in a combative mood to-day.

"I am afraid," said the Bishop, "that this dream of equality will never be realised. I have just been reading Dietrich's brilliant and portentous programme of the Socialism of the future. He affirms that priests, and kings, and nobles must be erased, with cathedrals, churches, palaces, town and country houses, and all their concomitants. But this was attempted in the great French Revolution, and the priest, the king, the noble returned in a year or two, in a new shape."

"Just so, Bishop. I am glad you take my side. In the Paris Commune days the palaces were not destroyed. They merely had different occupants: Madame Angot and Rabagas instead of Eugénie and Napoleon."

"Just so," said the Bishop, a little sententiously, failing, perhaps, to see that love rather than politics was the real question before the house. He thus continued:

"We have all our positions in life. With

these we may be satisfied, with these we may be dissatisfied. But we should remember this: we have not chosen these positions. Gradations in 'dignities' are a divine institution. A man's position is chosen for him by a Wiser Mind."

"That's true, that's very true," said Lady Barwise. "The lot in life of each of us is hard to bear. To all who have chronic gout this solemn truth comes home. At the same time I think that some people are very unjust, especially when Lord Avenue gave Canterbury to Doctor Bobus and not to you."

"Ah, I won't say that," said the Bishop, almost hinting that in the selection of primates lower minds than the Wiser Mind are sometimes at work.

"I don't quite know that Lord Aveling should repine at his lot," said Gwendoline.

"Lord Aveling?" said the Bishop, in a tone that he might have assumed had he been addressed in the Sanskrit language.

"Yes, yes; don't you know the romantic history of my nephew here?"

"Your nephew? Bless me, no!" said the Bishop, speaking in his natural voice, which he did not always do.

"A Mrs. Noel Manners—what was her real name—Mrs.—Mrs. Bob Cherry?"

"No, Tom Cherry, aunt. She married Mr. Tom Cherry, and then Lord Aveling, my father. She persuaded him that his marriage with Dora Huxtable was null and void. But this was proved a swindle. It was her marriage with my father that was a take in, a plot to extort money."

"Bless me, bless me!" said the Bishop. "This is most extraordinary. Allow me, my lord, to congratulate you and shake your hands."

There was a little extra cordiality in the Bishop here, due, perhaps, to the fact that in his little disquisition on the divine institution of gradations of "dignities," he had

glanced in a paternal and apostolic way at Monty himself.

That gentleman, at the express desire of Lady Barwise, now took up his quarters in Grosvenor Square.

CHAPTER XV.

GIM-CROCKERY.

The being that we dream of, and the bride that at St. James's Church binds herself to be our obedient slave till death, often turn out distinct characters. Sometimes the real seems inferior to the ideal. Sometimes, not often, the ideal seems inferior to the real. When Monty took up his quarters in Grosvenor Square, he certainly found himself in the presence of a new Lady Gwendoline. He had been accustomed to view her in two lights. She was a daughter of a Pharaoh, according to the reliable information of Madame de Puffendorff. Also she was a celestial Bride. Instead of all this he now found himself in the presence of a woman who

could laugh, and talk, and flirt. Whether this was due to a changed Monty or a changed Gwendoline was a question at present too deep for him. Hitherto he had looked up to her, chafed at her, feared her. Big houses, big coachmen, big Scaleses, big footmen had told him at every minute that he was immensely inferior to such a woman, and he had accepted his inferiority.

Two nights after his arrival a pretty scene took place. The young man in pulling out his handkerchief let something fall.

"Dear me, what's that? It glitters like a diamond," said Lady Barwise, who was in the room.

"As I live, it is a splendid ring!" said Gwendoline, picking it up.

"So it is. A very fine diamond and two fine sapphires. That's not a gentleman's ring. Where did you get this ring, Monty?"

"What a very indiscreet question, Emily! He bought it, of course, for a beautiful lady."

Gwendoline was in a provoking humour on this particular night.

"A lady! Who is she?"

"Worse and worse! You must not probe the secrets of young dragoons. Wait until they reveal them."

"There is more in that ring than Gwendoline thinks," said Monty, in anger.

"Is there? Tell us."

"Yes, do tell us," said Gwendoline, pursuing her mockery.

"It is a magic ring."

"Bless me," said Lady Barwise, dropping the ring, "the Bishop says that magic is wicked."

"It does not seem so very formidable," said Gwendoline, picking it up with sedate comedy.

"Yes; a wizard gave me that ring. It is a talisman that can tell a man for certain whether a lady really loves him."

"Oh, then it is a very valuable ring

indeed. So many people make mistakes in marriage. They think they are affinities; but they sometimes quarrel in a fortnight. Before marriage and after marriage folks are so different."

"The wizard must be very clever, for on this point even wizards sometimes go wrong," said the younger lady.

"This talisman is infallible," said Monty; "but the wizard added a condition."

"What was that?"

"He who used it must be poor."

"Then I shall keep this ring, at least for a time," and Gwendoline put the ring on her long, taper finger.

"What do you mean?" said Lady Barwise.

"It is of no use to Monty now, because he is a millionaire, I am a pauper. If in the impossibilities of the future any one makes love to me, I shall bring him to his bearings."

"It looks very well upon your finger,"

said Monty, whose blood was boiling in a wild delirium.

"So, so; it fits most execrably."

"It seems to me to fit you very well," said Lady Barwise.

"Oh, how it pinches! Ah!"

The sensations of Monty were easier to be imagined than described. The rich prize was his. There could be no doubt about it now. Lady Gwendoline had formally refused this engagement ring. Now she had accepted it almost with equal formality. Alnaschar visions were his. And a gentleman, possessing a Cobra Diamond, can make such visions more or less concrete. When he makes love to Marguerite, he can buy her pretty things. This thought was in Monty's mind the next morning as he sallied out. In Piccadilly he met Flint.

"What's up, old man?" said the Carabineer. He was got up for the Park—buttonhole and white hat.

"I'm going to do what ladies call a little shopping, Flint. I won't bore you with it."

"Shopping, I adore it. I'm only too fond. This is my weak point in evewything."

"Is there anything up this morning?"

"By gosh! Come to Cwisty Manson's, the sale of the year——"

"What's that?"

"Sir Charles Barmecide, senior, laid in pictures, bwick-a-bwack, jewelwy — finest collection in England. Sir Charles Barmecide, juniaw, has come to the hammaw. Cwisty says that in fifteen years or so most of the things he sells come back to him."

"Thrift, Esq., the father! Spend Thrift, Esq., the son! Remember, dear Flint, this fable and its moral."

"I wasn't born yesterday," said this volatile young officer; "no more was your grandmamma, my Lord of Aveling. Ah, here we are. By gosh, there is Pwospectus."

"Confound him!" muttered Monty.

"Oh, he has a gweat esteem for you. Pwospectus, we've come to do a little shopping."

"I hope you've brought your purse with you, Flint. Good morning, Lord Aveling."

"I told Aveling that you could put him up to some good things."

"What sort of things do you want?"

"What Thackeray calls 'gim-crockery,'" said Flint, answering for his friend.

"Come this way a moment, I'll show you a gem," said the willing Prospectus. "Look here, a pair of vases of Celadon porcelain. The birds, you see, are in chased ormolu."

"They are," said Flint. Monty kept a little in the background.

"It is what they call drab crackled. It is the finest thing that Sir Charles Barmecide ever possessed."

"By Jove, it will go up in the bidding."

"Allow me also to point out this *secrétaire*

of marquetry. The 'plaques,' as they are called, are of Sèvres, with ormolu mounts."

"I like the shepherd in pink satin making love to the sky-blue shepherdess. I should like to make love to a sky-blue shepherdess myself, so would you, Pwospectus; don't say you wouldn't."

The worthy Colonel Prospectus possessed two arts: the art of making an old man look young, and the art of making a young man look old. The second art, in which he was materially assisted by the daughters of the Horseleech Theatre, was the less *postiche* of the two. On the other side of the street folks seeing the Colonel, with his fresh "button-hole," his conspicuous bit of handkerchief, his stick, and all the latest *singeries* of youthful fashion, were wont to call out, "What a young old man!" But when he crossed the road, and showed his premature crows'-feet and wrinkles, his wig and his hair-dye, folks exclaimed, "What an old young man!"

From Folly (male) he received every year an income which he passed on to Folly (female).

And if late hours, and vitiated air, and whisky-and-water were telling on his constitution, it is to be confessed that this was due to business rather than vice. To entrap the guileless fast man he had to associate with him in his confiding moments. Whether the Colonel purchased three hundred and sixty-five hats in the year was a puzzle to his friends. Each day he seemed to wear a new one, and trousers without a wrinkle.

Around were the grim, melancholy men, dealers and patrons, that one sees only at Christy's. There was, as usual, Sir Charles Pocklington, who has twenty-two thousand a year, but who looked as dirty and as sad as Mr. Joash, pawnbroker and picture-fancier. Pictures were being sold at the moment, and none of these men seemed to have the least feeling for art. Pedigree was their chief con-

sideration, but all had a certain cunning also in the matter of authenticity, the chief test being the age of the canvas. The mighty Sir George Beaumont of old days who valued the "new man" Turner's "Old *Téméraire*" at the price of the frame, had left his mantle behind him. A spirited bidding was going on for a fine specimen of the Dutch painter, Von Grimer. It was a landscape with lampblack trees and grass of a warm brown. A dairy-maid and a cow a little out of drawing were in the foreground, but this as a test of authenticity made the picture more valuable.

Suddenly the attention of Monty was arrested by a pair of eyes looking fixedly at him. They seemed to give him the same sensation that he had felt at Covent Garden opera. He scrutinised the owner of the eyes, expecting to see the same mysterious man. No, the man was a Jew dealer, stuck about with bits of broken bottles, green and white, which did fairly well for emeralds and

diamonds. He had a large white hat, and a double eye-glass. On the top of the former he supported a catalogue, which he examined very carefully when he found that Monty was looking.

It was fortunate that Monty had the diamond that gives people the desire of their heart on this particular morning, for he developed quite a mania for spending. In this he was assisted by the excellent Colonel Prospectus. Flint departed on business of his own, but the Colonel clung to him. Now Monty quite hated Prospectus. This gentleman was a sort of hanger-on of the Grandison family, and Monty remembered his rudeness in the ancient days. But this morning, although he tried at first to be curt and cavalier, he could not get quit of the Colonel. That intelligent person seemed to know everybody in London that wanted to sell anything excellent and anything cheap. He carried the young dragoon

away to show him a diamond necklace and brooch and earrings that the Thakoor of Bangle Pindy was surreptitiously selling. He carried him off to taste some Dry Monopole champagne, and some claret that was quite priceless. He showed him carriages, pictures, "gim-crockery"; and Monty consented to buy he scarcely remembered what. Two fine bays were put in a tilbury, and they drove to Ranelagh.

And all through the day, as the worthy Colonel Prospectus poured out his amateur broker cackle, Monty thought of the Lady Gwendoline. She had accepted his ring, a ring that meant union, therefore the most beautiful things in London should be hers. If he were Faust and she Marguerite, she should at any rate have more than Marguerite's share of pretty knick-knacks.

But when a gentleman sells his soul to the devil, matters don't always turn out as

comfortably as could be wished. When Monty reached the drawing-room in Grosvenor Square, matters were complicated with —a rival.

In the drawing-room was Sub-Lieutenant Flint of the Carabineers, making himself quite at home. He had called to see Monty, and Gwendoline had persuaded Lady Barwise to admit him. The aunt consented on account of Monty, and the frank young officer had certainly amused her. Then Lady Barwise had gone off to her room, and Gwendoline and Mr. Flint were alone.

"So glad you've come in, old fellow!" said Flint as Monty entered.

"What you tell me about Lord and Lady Vavasour is so interesting," said Gwendoline, scarcely noticing Monty at all.

"Cat and dog — positively. I know Lady Vavasour well — in fact she's rather a pal, as we say——"

"Is she pretty?"

"Not pretty exactly, but a splendid figure—looks well in full dress at night."

"Is she nice?"

"Nice and cleva. Lord Vavasour is also cleva—in his way. Pwiggish, learned—I hate pwiggish people."

"So do I—mortally."

"And so does Lady Vavasour, hates Lord Vavasour mortally — a three volume novel preparing with such a catastwophe."

"Indeed."

"Yes, Lord Benyon is the happy hewo."

"I thought he was engaged elsewhere."

"You mean Mrs. St. Maur; but pwofessional beauties are out of fashion just now. Pwofessional beauties are found out."

"Do you know Mrs. St. Maur, Monty?" said Gwendoline.

"No, I don't."

"When I first met her at Sandilands she was the wage. New costume evewy night, each worth four hundred pounds."

All this irritated Monty immensely. It is unpleasant to be kept out in the cold. It is doubly unpleasant to hear fashionable cackle about people that you have never seen. It is trebly unpleasant to see a lady who wears your engagement ring flirting with somebody else. Monty left abruptly to go to his club.

CHAPTER XVI.

"GET THEE TO A NUNNERY."

MONTY rushed off to the club, to be rid of Second Lieutenant Flint. He did not like to admit in his mind that he considered such a little whipper-snapper a rival. For all that, he was obliged to confess that Flint represented Flint's bank, a vast and solvent enterprise. He was obliged also to confess that in a courtship between even Faust and Marguerite, vast sums of money were as potent as sentiment.

Monty had come to the club to escape Flint; but just before dinner Flint accosted him:

"I have ordered a double table, and

told them to place my dinner of herbs by the side of your luxurious banquet."

"But, my dear fellow, I have been shopping all day and am tired, dull, stupid. Don't let me spoil your dinner."

"Tired. Every one says that you are now the picture of rude, robust health. Galbraith of the Bays said just now he did not recognise you."

"Well, to-night, I think I'll dine alone."

"No, you shan't—you bet."

"You are a tyrant."

"Have you seen the *St. James's*?"

"No."

"Such fun, such excitement. The plot thickens. I beg your pardon, I am always forgetting that Lord Aveling was your governor."

"What is this new intelligence?" said Monty, much interested.

"A new expert has come forward who knows all about Indian poisons. Here is the newspaper."

All this was very strange. What did it mean? Insensibly the mind of the young officer reverted to J. T. Ditmas.

"These oysters are shocking," said Mr. Flint, an hour after this; "and yet they charge three and sixpence a dozen for them. Positively we must get up that cavalry club."

"It ought to be done."

"Infantwy don't understand oysters."

"Not they."

"What a dam fine creature your cousin is; handsome—really handsome!"

"If she meets with your critical approval, I am certain she will die happy."

"What I like is an awistocwatic woman. By Jawge, she is an empwess—haughty, indiffewent. I love indiffewent women."

"Damme, Flint," said Monty, with some irritation, "don't keep all the wine to yourself because you are falling in love."

"In London there are two pastimes—weal hunting, and the papaw chase."

"Will you forgive me, my dear Flint, if I tell you that I don't understand your slang?"

"You'll understand the papaw chase fast enough now, my Lord Aveling."

"What do you mean?"

"When a man has papaw at his banker's, he is not a hunter, but hunted. Fascinating young women pursue him everywhere. He has no west but the gwave."

"I catch your meaning now," said Monty, amused in spite of himself.

"So that if a twue believa in London possesses the handkerchief of the Pashaw, there is little wonder if that twue believa throws it to awctresses and beauties more or less pwofessional, to folks who give him all the advantages of polygamy without the dwawback of the sack and the Bosphowus. Mawwiage is the sack and the Bosphowus."

"It is a sack that is very tight in the mouth," said Monty.

"Mawwiage is vewy sewious," pursued the young Carabineer, in a solemn tone.

"Is that a reason why you should keep all that whitebait to yourself?"

"By gad, Monty, only one woman that I ever met would tempt me to the Bosphowus, and that is Lady Gwendoline."

Indian holiday-makers have a queer custom. This is to fasten sharp hooks into the backs of the more pious of the congregation, and swing them about on large slanting masts. Some such oscillation on the tenter-hooks was now felt by Monty. One day he received a snub from his lady-love, and the next day a smile. One day he felt angry with her for flirting with little Flint, and the next day he felt angry with himself for promoting that vacuous young officer to the full-blown dignity of rival. Thus matters went on until one memorable evening, when he ventured to remonstrate

with the proud young lady, and received a bit of a surprise.

"I don't know that matters can go on much longer as they are going now, Gwendoline."

"What matters?" said the calm young lady.

"Ah, you don't know what I am alluding to. Well, to put the business more plainly, I am in love."

"You have told me so before."

"And even a man in love is not made of cast iron. He has feelings, sensitiveness, irritability."

"Plenty of irritability, I dare say."

"May I make a remark? You wear an engagement ring on your finger, accepted from me."

"That is not my recollection of the transaction. You told me that this was a magical ring. I understood that it would point out to me a true lover, show me whether he was patient, enduring, of lofty aims."

"At any rate, it is my engagement ring, and not the property of any other British dragoon."

"What, are you jealous of Mr. Flint?" said the daughter of the Pharaoh.

"Answer me this: Do you love me, or do you not?"

The lady looked down on the ring for a moment with comedy that was chastened and sedate.

"The magic ring gives no response," she said, slowly.

"What do you mean?"

"Although you are perhaps not aware of the fact, there are practically two Gwendolines——"

"Two Gwendolines!"

"One is the Gwendoline that you chiefly admire. A woman with many engaging qualities, no doubt; but worldly—a trifle worldly."

"I agree with you, she has many engaging qualities."

"The other is a different Gwendoline—a Gwendoline with aspirations."

"Tell me about her."

"You may not be aware of the fact that a few days ago I got into quite a scrape with my dearest relations for taking your part."

"I am very glad to hear it."

"I said to my mamma that I proposed to ask you to procure a license."

"License—what license?"

"A marriage license."

"A marriage license! Why?"

"A marriage license is usually procured for the purpose of allowing two people to unite themselves by the holy rite of matrimony."

"Darling Gwendoline," said Monty, advancing with a plain intention of embracing her.

"Stop, stop; you must hear first the reasons that I gave to my fond mamma for taking that extreme step."

"I don't want to. The extreme step is an excellent idea; but the reasons for it, like those of the judge in the fable, might be faulty."

"Ah, but those reasons are very important. At that time you were simply Captain Lepel——"

"Yes, yes."

"And I told my mamma that I would make you take me to Budgebudge or Dumdum in India."

"Why Dumdum?"

"Because Dumdum is seventeen thousand six hundred and seventy-one geographical miles, and seventeen thousand, one hundred and thirty English miles from Vanity Fair."

"All right. I'll get the marriage license, and we'll go off to Dumdum at once."

"No, no; things are quite altered now. A marriage with Captain Lepel would have taken me clean away from the great Kingdom

of Arrogance. A marriage with Lord Aveling would plunge me back into it."

"Nonsense," said Monty, advancing again.

"'Tis a very wicked kingdom," said the lady. "We grin, we cozen, we lie. We jilt our humble lovers."

"Nonsense, nonsense," said Monty, emboldened by the pretty comedy manner of the lady in this speech. This time he succeeded in placing his arm around her, and he gave her a kiss. To his great delight it was returned.

"Tut, we must talk seriously," said the lady a moment afterwards, breaking away from him. "Answer me this: Is it a fact or is it not that you have accused me of acting quite ignobly towards Lord George Ingilby?"

"I never mentioned his name," said Monty, taken aback. This was the first time any allusion to him had passed her lips.

"No, that won't do. You must be candid now or never. You believe that I am

sufficient 'woman of the world,' 'sordid creature,' call it what you will, to abandon a solemn engagement if from a worldly point of view it is not sufficiently promising——"

"Gwendoline, you must not remember unjust words——"

"Yes, yes, I must remember them if they throw light upon so serious a thing as a proposed marriage. You love me, you say, and you think I can do the heartless things that I have just mentioned. You give me showy horses, knick-knacks, diamonds. You love the glittering world. Suppose that I abhor it." She spoke with a shimmer of enthusiasm.

"Gwendoline!"

"Suppose that to-morrow morning I announce to you that I have become a sister."

"A sister! A nun!"

"Yes."

"You are not a Roman Catholic."

"There are Protestant nuns."

"Gwendoline, this is extravagance. Nuns

quarrel about a good place in chapel as duchesses quarrel about a good place at Court. They are dissatisfied with their helpings of pudding and salt fish. Instead of being more spiritual than their neighbours they are more material."

"There are Protestant nuns that take no vows, and rarely squabble about salt fish, for if they like they could come home again and have turtle soup. There is my friend, Lady Dolly Forlong, who goes with a truck every morning amongst the poor workmen of St. Katherine's Docks, and sells scraps to the famished for a nominal sum. It is found better to make a small charge for this food than to give it gratuitously. In the evening Lady Dolly washes up mugs, platters, at a nuns' home at Whitechapel, and finds this more amusing than waltzing with Life Guardsmen."

Suddenly there was a rattle at the door, and Millicent appeared, looking like death.

"What is it?" said Monty, wondering if he had been detected.

"A telegram. I must go at once to The Lilacs."

"At this time of night?"

"Maud is dying."

"I will come with you," said Monty. "I will go and order the carriage."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PROPERTIES OF A COBRA DIAMOND.

We have lately quite lost sight of Madame de Puffendorff. Is it a law that no wonder in England can last more than nine days? Or perhaps the machinations of the Elementary Spirit called Gimbo have proved too strong. Certainly a sceptical party headed by Miss Hislop, who is engaged to be married to D'Eresby, opposed her stoutly, and went so far as to assert that Chupatty was seen by the maids close to Monty's bedroom just before the great miracle that introduced the Cobra Diamond to my readers.

At Newton Priors the good lady, under the inspiration of the wise Wung Dumpy, the

Ocean of Unspeakable Qualities, announced that Monty and Gwendoline were twin souls; an unfortunate announcement, we must mention, for through Colonel Prospectus it got to the ears of Lord Grandison and made him furious. Some time afterwards, calling in Grosvenor Square, the foreign lady corrected her first statement and announced that it was Millicent and Monty who were twin souls. The Ocean of Unspeakable Qualities had been misunderstood.

This revelation was partly due to an accident that will have an important bearing on our story. Millicent, as I have announced, was introduced by Lady Poyntz, and her magnetism was found to have a very soothing effect.

One day Lady Barwise, when she did not know that Millicent had ever seen Monty, discovered a miniature of that gentleman on the floor, and Millicent, questioned, acknowledged with a blush that it was hers.

On this small incident Lady Barwise built up a wonderful superstructure.

"I guess your secret, dearest; you loved him."

"What an idea!" said Millicent, blushing still more.

"You did, you did. Doggety doggums. Blushums. Secretums."

"It must have been a very long time ago."

"Didn't I say so? Doggety doggums. Affinitums. Complementarums."

Madame de Puffendorff happened to call that day, and she confirmed this fancy of Lady Barwise. Since that good lady had discovered that through the long ages the late Lord Barwise had been a warm and faithful lover of hers under many disguises, her mind dwelt much upon "Affinitums" and "Complementarums."

Monty, as he sat by the side of Millicent,

felt that of late he had rather neglected her and the Huxtables.

The night was dark and felt oppressive, in spite of the quick motion of the carriage. Storms moral, and storms physical, are heralded by a lull.

On sped the dashing grays through busy London. Carpets were spread out here to welcome Feasting, and straw there to welcome Death. Now they passed the Thames, and a cluster of barges with large brown sails triced up, and as round these the broken moonbeams twinkled like diamonds, Monty thought of Maud.

A very rare thing is a friendship between a young man and a young girl. On such occasions sex promptly asserts itself. On one side or another this friendship ripens—or shall I say deteriorates?—into passion. With the lady the orthodox mechanism of coquetteries and defensive warfare comes into play. In

Maud, Monty had found a real friend. She was sincere and thoroughly unself-conscious. She could talk to men without an after-thought—simply. A few short days ago and he had admired her rare beauty. How strange that such a thing, like a flower of exquisite perfume, should fade in a night!

When they reached The Lilacs, Millicent hurried upstairs. Monty was left with the papa in his study. Mr. Huxtable was a stout man, with a conspicuous white waistcoat in the summer months. He had large gold eyeglasses, stiff gray whiskers, a bald head; and although he drank nothing but toast and water, he had a florid appearance, half jovial, half scorbutic.

"How is Maud?" said Monty.

"A leetle better. She has taken a little nourishment."

Monty felt that he was in the way, and determined to get away as soon as he could. He had dismissed the carriage on his arrival.

"Don't go yet, Monty," said Mr. Huxtable. His manner to-night was embarrassed.

"Well, I'll come in the morning when I shall be less in the way," said the young dragoon.

"It has begun to rain," said Mr. Huxtable, whose manner grew still more strange; "and perhaps, by-and-by—by-and-by, I have something to talk to you about."

"To me?"

"Yes, in connection with—a little property of—your mother."

At this moment a servant came and summoned Mr. Huxtable to the sick-room. Monty determined to slip away.

The night was very oppressive and very dark. Large drops of rain were falling lazily. Monty soon reached the common. A railway was near with its flaring coloured lights. Soon he came upon a fringe of old trees that rim the common. The distant thunder was sounding, and a passing train sent up a shrill

scream. At this moment he was startled by a whisper close to his ear :

"When last we met, Lord Aveling, I omitted to recount a second little peculiarity of the Cobra Diamond. It takes as well as gives. It transfers life's baubles, the blushing cheek, and the shining gold. It obeys the great law of compensation."

"What do you mean?" said Monty, staggered and terrified. The speaker was Jeswunt Sirdar.

"Another little piece of—what shall I say? —Sanskrit pedantry. The word Jagganâtha means Lord of the Jagat, the seen, the palpable world, the only world that the England of Huxley believes in. If there be another world, it is beyond the ken of the Cobra Diamond."

Monty turned round to question the Indian, but he had vanished.

In the darknesses of this mortal life there are lightning flashes that reveal the truth

for a second. One such appalling coruscation had come upon Monty in that soaking rain. The words of the Indian had fallen upon his ear like the sods on a coffin. Each had its distinct sound.

"The Cobra Diamond transfers life's baubles, the rosy cheek, and the shining gold!"

How true this seemed, now that the young dragoon reflected upon the events that had happened since he first saw the Asiatic! It had transferred the coronet of the Avelings from his father's brow to his. It had transferred the healthy cheek of Maud. It had transferred Jack's good fortune, and transferred his (Monty's) evil fortune.

All this time the storm was flashing around, and lighting up weirdly, for a second or two, the houses on the common, lighting up the distant house where Maud was dying.

But a far more terrible fancy now revealed itself. Had not the infernal Indian talisman

a more weird attribute? Lord Aveling had died. Maud was dying. Jack had disappeared ruined and humbled, and his long silence was as the silence of the grave. Wherever the car of Juggernath passed, dead victims lay in the roadway.

Suddenly a mighty consternation was in the mind of the young dragoon.

"I am like Faust," he said. "I have toyed with unhallowed arts. For the kiss of Marguerite I have clambered to a coveted goal, the kingdom of the devil himself, of which Mayfair is the centre. I reach it to find Marguerite escaping in a nun's dress. This stroke of irony is worthy of Mephistopheles."

And seized with a strong emotion Monty took the Cobra Diamond from out of his shirt, and pitched it into the glittering pool.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PACT WITH SATANAS.

THE next day Monty got up late. A letter was put into his hand:

"Telegraphic address: L.A.W., London. "5, FURNIVAL'S INN, LONDON, E.C.

"IN *re* AVELING, EXECUTORS, ADMINISTRATORS AND ASSIGNS.

"MY LORD,

"It is necessary that we should promptly make an important communication to the executors, administrators, and assigns of the estate of the late Lord Aveling. One of our partners will wait upon you at your earliest convenience. It would be advisable

if the Lady Barwise were present at the interview.

"Yours faithfully,

"LAWFORD AND WEST.

"THE LORD AVELING,
2nd Dragoons (The Scots Greys)."

Monty crushed this letter into his pocket, thinking it had little to do with his present troubles. In this he was wrong.

It was lunch-time before he saw any of the household. Lady Gwendoline was away, and Lady Barwise did not appear until that meal was announced. Maud was still alive, and the Bishop, who was present, said the best things that could be said under the circumstances, but commonplace condolences grated on Monty to-day.

When Monty got out of the house he wanted air. London in August is suffocating, materially and morally.

He hailed a hansom, and told the man to drive quickly, he cared not whither. Past

Kensington and Hammersmith and stately old Chiswick he bowled away. At Kew he dismissed the cab, and plunged amongst the beech-trees in the unfrequented portion of the Gardens.

Monty was haggard, tired, feverish. One mastering thought had been with him in the night watches, and it was with him still. He must give up the Lady Gwendoline. He was Faust, and the kiss of Faust was as the breath of a marsh in autumn. But could he give up the Lady Gwendoline? Never before had she been presented to his mind so beautiful, so lovable, so winning. He remembered every tone and gesture during yesterday's interview. How basely he had misjudged her!

The footsteps of the young officer had carried him unconsciously in the direction of the Thames. A pretty pathway, smothered in leaves, runs along the river's bank at one part of the Gardens. Monty had reached

this when his ear was attracted by the sound of a cornet. He looked up and saw a steam-launch close to him. On board were two ladies, and he thought that in one he recognised a popular actress. Two men in boating flannels were on board. One was little Flint, the other Colonel Prospectus. A wild apprehension that he might be recognised, suddenly came over Monty. He plunged into the thickest portion of the pathway.

This appearance of the silly little officer seemed to intensify our hero's compunction. He had actually treated this young whipper-snapper as a rival. Was not this virtually bringing Gwendoline into the mephitic atmosphere of green-rooms and footlights? He felt more and more disgusted with himself.

The steps of Monty had carried him to a large edifice of glass, within which were pathways and benches by rich tropical foliage. The long green teeth of palms interlaced in a picturesque tangle. Near the seat of

the young dragoon was a plant whose large leaves were each like a Japanese fan artistically bespattered with dull purples and sharp greens. Beyond was the *Crinum Asiaticum*, with its white flower and delicious scent. Above was the Pandanus, with its yellow moss and its descending boughs.

All this time the young dragoon had treated his love-making with Gwendoline as a thing of the past. He admitted in his secret soul that he was still in love. A more rigid self-examination might have elicited the confession that in the last few hours his love had increased one-hundredfold. But this love had emerged from simple selfishness. He could now think of the happiness of the lady as well as his own. Dare he enmesh her in the same tremendous drama that was developing around him? If he had sold his soul to the devil, was that any reason why he should drag her down to Tophet?

The young man got up from the bench on which he was sitting, and near him, on another bench, he saw the Bishop of Dorminster. A sudden resolution flashed through his brain. Holy men of old could exorcise the demoniac host. Why should not a bishop do so now? At any rate he might give him advice.

"My lord, do you believe in sortilege, spells, charms?" he said, abruptly.

"Sortilege, sortilege! Good Heavens, it's Lord Aveling!"

"I ask you a question, and I ask it in no light spirit, believe me. Do you in your heart believe that a stone can kill one—two—three people?"

"Stones in the arblast of the Middle Ages, and in the punishment of lapidation with the Jews, have killed a great many people," said the Bishop, who was considerably astonished at the young man's excitement.

"I am alluding to a little stone, a gem of moderate size."

"A little stone—dear me—dear me!"

"Can you believe that a modern gentleman in the nineteenth century, in London, can be bound over body and soul in the net of the Evil One?"

"I should say, decidedly so! Figuratively."

"Ah, but I'm alluding to a business that can't be disposed of with a trope." And Monty poured into the ear of the astonished Bishop the story of the Cobra Diamond, much as it has been narrated in these pages.

"Dear me, dear me," said the astonished prelate, "all this is very extraordinary.'

"Very horrible!" said Monty.

"But with modern science there is a safe rule. We must steer clear of confounding our facts with our inferences from those facts."

"I don't quite understand——"

"Take one instance. I record a wish for a certain thing, say luck at play, on an object presumed to be a talisman. I go to a club with a gentleman named Dunstable, I think; at least Dunstable will do. I win a great deal of money. He loses a great deal of money. Nothing very miraculous about the second event. Mr. Dunstable disappears. I jump to the conclusion that I have ruined him and killed him. You see what very large jumps I have been obliged to make——"

"Yes, but the Cobra Diamond always gives a man his wish!"

"According to your inference. But in each case you have to make a jump somewhat similar to the one I have detailed."

"You do not believe in talismans, spells, charms?"

"There are no doubt many legends concerning such. Last summer in Scot-

land, I had put into my hand the luck of the Lockharts, the 'talisman' of Scott——"

"But the Jews, so I read last night at my club, are expressly commanded in the Bible to bind amulets on their foreheads, door-posts, and so on. Christianity, too, has its rosary and other charms. If a physical object has abnormal powers of good, may it not have abnormal powers of evil?"

"The Bible," said the Bishop, in a calm, matter-of-fact matter, "is a volume that requires very, very careful interpretation. As a bishop this has been brought home to me. Many clergymen in my diocese, excellent worthy men, deem that Holy Writ shall be taken perfectly literally. Many other clergymen, equal to their opponents in zeal and conduct, contend that science has rendered impracticable the literal reception of the geology of Moses, the astronomy of Joshua. They contend that the Bible contains the truth, but

does not constitute itself the truth. The divines of the Reformation seem to have acted in part on some such theory. Certainly a faith in amulets has been discarded in the Reformed Church."

The reasoning of the Bishop failed to satisfy Monty, but it had one marked effect. When he parted from his lordship he began no longer to see any real obstacle in the pathway of a marriage between himself and Gwendoline. If the Cobra Diamond was a genuine engine of destruction, if his crimes were real, at any rate the lady had no complicity in them. Why should she be made unhappy if she really loved?

A little steamer was starting in the gloaming. Monty jumped on board. The hot air of summer was cooled by the vessel's progress. In a dreamy manner he passed into the heart of the great city along its ancient water-path.

"Lord Aveling!"

Monty had got out of the little steamer at Westminster Bridge. In Parliament Street these words suddenly arrested him as he was walking to his club.

"What is it?"

"I have sent off a policeman to Grosvenor Square." The speaker was J. T. Ditmas.

"Anything happened?"

"Not much. Are you the possessor of a handsome shirt-stud—a large diamond?"

"Well, yes," said Monty, with faltering accents that made Mr. J. T. Ditmas stare. Was the Cobra Diamond actually coming back to him?

"Well, this diamond has been discovered in the possession of a tramp—a tinker—under most suspicious circumstances. He is now being examined at Scotland Yard; if you would kindly come there——"

"At once—yes."

"He says that in the middle of a thunder-storm yesterday night he saw you on Wandsworth Common. You looked round and round to see if any one was looking, and then you threw it into a horse-pond."

"Well, well, inspector, that is the truth—I mean so far as it was presented to the mind of the tramp. The fact is that I wanted to be rid of a letter from a young lady not addressed, and I threw away the shirt-stud instead. The looking round is the mythical element which clings to most historical narratives."

"It is wonderful that he recovered it."

"Yes; how did he do that?"

"He waited until dawn, and then saw the diamond glittering on the bank. You had thrown it too far."

Monty was aghast. The Cobra Diamond returned to him! A tiny stone was pitched into a muddy horse-pond on a dark night, and here it was again. When he visited Bow

Street and received the stone, he received it with actual trembling. When we make a pact with Mephistopheles, he keeps us to our bargain.

END OF VOL. I.

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